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ABSTRACT

Nine research papers, written by college-bound Choctaw high school students, discuss the history and culture of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. In developing the papers students read current and historical texts, conducted interviews with tribal members and tribal employees, and developed survey questionnaires. Two reports discuss the lives of Choctaw chiefs Pushmataha, 1764-1824, and Greenwood LeFlore, 1800-1865. Other historical reports cover early village life, codes of behavior and punishments, marriage and courtship practices, and 19th century missionary efforts among the Choctaw. An overview of Choctaw language includes the results of a survey of 36 students concerning their knowledge of Choctaw language and their attitudes toward instruction in Choctaw. A report on legends and superstitions also contains results of a survey of 31 students who were fairly knowledgeable about old Choctaw legends and superstitions but had few personal supernatural experiences. The final article discusses recent Choctaw economic development and housing trends and includes interviews with four employees of the Choctaw Housing Authority and a Choctaw-owned construction firm. Each report includes footnotes, bibliography, and black and white photographs. (JHZ)

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A CHOCTAW ANTHOLOGY III

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These are student-written papers developed
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FOREWORD

This third volume of the "Choctaw Anthology" series marks another step forward by the students at Choctaw Central High School, especially those students in the College Preparatory Class of 1984-1985, who prepared the articles in this volume.

Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, under Title IV, Part B, of the Indian Education Act, the Choctaw History, Culture, and Current Events (CHCCE) program in the tribal Department of Education provided students the opportunity to enter the world of scholarly research while learning a great deal about their tribe, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. While these papers do not represent pure, documented research and should not be used for scholarly purposes or citations, they do represent an opportunity to look at historical texts and develop findings and conclusions seldom offered to American Indian students at the secondary level.

Edited by the CHCCE staff, the articles were corrected for typographical errors; sources, footnote and bibliography entries were verified; and the drafts were expanded for clarity and completeness. In keeping with a respect for the rhetoric and grammar of the past, direct quotations with variant spellings have been preserved by the editors.

This volume is a result of an overall effort to make available to Choctaw high school students increased skills in research, study skills, reading, vocabulary development, and English composition, which will further increase their chances of success in college work. I am sure you will enjoy, and learn from, their efforts as assembled in A CHOCTAW ANTHOLOGY III.

Philip Martin

Philip Martin, Chief
Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Phillip Martin, Tribal Chief, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Seal of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

8

Morning mists surround
A sleeping Choctaw village
While a new day breaks

CHAPTER 1

CHOCTAW VILLAGE SCENES

James Willis

Major historical accounts of the Choctaws were written fifty to seventy-five years after "permanent white contact was established." Peterson states that descriptions of the Choctaws in the latter eighteenth century represent "not a traditional culture but a culture in transition." Therefore, some traits attributed to the Choctaws are really "products" of this transition period.[1]

As recorded by earlier writers, the Choctaws were at that period of time, the "most accomplished farmers in the Southwest. . . ." Agricultural plots were located near each house. Although other Southeastern tribes practiced communal fields, no record of such fields among the Choctaws had been recorded, according to Peterson. Major crops included: "several varieties of corn, beans, squashes, pumpkins, melons, and sunflowers."[2]

Hunting was another means used by the Choctaws to provide necessary food from one crop season to another. Small animals were hunted throughout the year; however, deer and bear were the "major game animals."[3]

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[1]John H. Peterson, Jr., "The Choctaws in Mississippi, the Pascagoula, Acolapissa, and Bayogoula" (unpublished manuscript, Mississippi State University), p. 6.

[2]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[3]Ibid., p. 8.

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In the "late fall and early winter" the population among the Choctaws was "dispersed somewhat," because the men traveled to different areas to hunt, while "the women, children and older people gathered nuts and fall fruits." This "population dispersal" led some writers to believe that the Choctaws "were a migrant people." Peterson records that Halbert's observation of this pattern in the late nineteenth century, "makes it clear that this was only one phase of the Choctaw annual cycle."[4]

An eighteenth century French manuscript, quoted by Swanton, gives "the best early account, of the Choctaw house and menage. . . ."

> The house is merely a cabin made of wooden posts of the size of the leg, buried in the earth, and fastened together with lianas [vines], which make very flexible bands. The rest of the wall is of mud and there are no windows; the door is only from three to four feet in height. The cabins are covered with bark of the cypress or pine. A hole is left at the top of each gable-end to let the smoke out, for they make their fires in the middle of the cabins, which are a gunshot distant from one another. . . .[5]

Swanton also quotes a Mr. Mease, author of the "Narrative of a Journey Through Several Parts of the Province of West Florida in the Years 1770 and 1771." It is the description of a house in the town of Imoklasha (in Neshoba County, Mississippi), owned by a Choctaw Indian named Astolabe.

> This house is nearly of a circular figure and built of clay mixed with haulm [straw or grass]. The top is conical and covered with a kind of thatch [the nature of] which I cou'd not make out. The inside roof is divided into four parts and there are cane seats raised about two feet from the ground which go round the building (I mean on the inside), broad enough to lie upon, making the wall serve the purpose of a pillow. Underneath these seats or beds they keep their potatoes and pumpions cover'd with earth but their corn is in a building by itself raised at least eight feet from the ground. The fire place is in the middle of the floor, just as in some parts of the Highlands of Scotland only they have no aperture at top to evacuate the smoke. The door is opposite one side (for the house is round without, yet on the inside it approaches near to the figure of an octagon) and is exceeding small in both height and breadth.[6]

Cushman describes Choctaw housing as follows:

> They lived in houses made of logs, but very comfortable; not more rude or uncouth, however, than many of the whites even of the present

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[4] Ibid.

[5] John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931), p. 37.

[6] Ibid., pp. 38-39

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day. Their houses consisted generally of two rooms, both of which were used for every domestic purpose--conking, eating, living and sleeping; nor was their furniture disproportionate with that of the dwelling--for the sitting room, a stool or two; for the kitchen, a pot or kettle, two or three tincups, a large and commodious wooden bowl, and a horn spoon, constituted about the ultimate--'twas all they needed, all they wanted, and with it they were perfectly contented and supremely happy.[7]

Deweese, citing Bushnell, records that it is "known that the Choctaws lived in the same general area for three centuries. They lived in villages throughout a large part of present-day Mississippi and the eastern part of Alabama."[8]

According to Adair, an English trader, as quoted by Deweese, the country of the Choctaws was situated about thirty-three and thirty-four degrees north latitude. "According to the course of the Indian path," the lower towns in the western portion of the district were located about two hundred miles north of New Orleans; and the upper towns were located about one hundred sixty miles south of the Chickasaw Nation. In Muscogee country, one hundred fifty miles to the east of Choctaw country, was the large French, Alabama garrison. Mobile, the first French settlement in West Florida, was about one hundred fifty miles south.[9]

Claiborne records that when missionaries began their work among the Choctaws in 1818, the Choctaws "were found in a semi-civilized state, living in huts or cabins, cultivating small patches of corn and beans in a very primitive fashion, and some of them owning herds of a small breed of horses and cattle. . . ." Land was free; little cabins were built by the "side of some bubbling spring."[10]

According to Peterson, the population of Choctaw towns varied--from "seventy-five to approximately a thousand." The towns were made up primarily of individual houses, "sometimes spread along a stream but in the north and east more tightly clustered within a fortified wall."[11] "Every village of any size was built around an open space, which

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[7]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, ed. Angie Debo (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), p. 173.

[8]Orval H. Deweese, "The Mississippi Choctaws" (unpublished manuscript, Mississippi State University, 1957), pp. 1-2.

[9]Ibid., p. 2.

[10]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), pp. 500-501.

[11]John H. Peterson, Jr., "The Choctaws in Mississippi, the Pascagoula, Acolapissa, and Bayogoula," p. 9.

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was used for dances, councils, and other community gatherings."[12]

Swanton states that when Europeans "came to know . . . [the Choctaw tribe] intimately . . . , three geographical divisions were recognized. . . ." However, he felt that "to introduce any order into the several town classifications" handed down, that four divisions were necessary.

> It seems pretty clear that the Sixtown Indians (Okla Hannali) and their immediate neighbors, who lived in the southern part of the old Choctaw territory, were early differentiated from the rest, the separation being partly linguistic and partly cultural. Sometimes this division is limited absolutely to the six towns which gave it its name, but more often it is extended to include certain neighboring towns, particularly Chicasawhay and Yowani, which seem to have shared in some measure the peculiarities of the group. Another small body, centrally located, embraced those towns in which, early in the eighteenth century, lived the principal officials of the entire nation, the Kunshak or Cane towns being particularly noteworthy among them. The importance of this group is reflected in the name which Regis du Roullet gives to it, the Big People (Okla Chito). The remaining towns were divided into two parties, one to the west known as the "Long People" (Okla Falaya), and one to the east, the "People of the Opposite Side (or Party)" (Okla tannap).[13]

Tom Goldman, a Mississippi attorney and an authority of Mississippi archeological sites and villages, made the following comments about Choctaw sites and villages:

"Around 1700-1832, Choctaw towns were spread out; buildings may have been one-hundred yards apart. A village could have been four or five miles long, so not all Choctaws knew everyone in their village.

"The Choctaws did not have a communal herd, as the Creeks did. There were no common fields or storage, just individual efforts. Each family in the village site had a summer house, a winter house, and a corn crib for storage.

"Towns facing Alabama on the Tombigbee River were stockaded against raids from the Creeks. Towns in the interior had no stockades. The ideal locations for settlement were on hills near water, and

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[12]Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), pp. 7-8.

[13]John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, pp. 55-56.

(Author's note: Swanton, pages fifty-eight through seventy-five, constructed a table listing Choctaw towns and identifying the authority/author of each list and the division in which each placed the towns. A portion of this table can be found at the end of this chapter.)

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preferably at the fork of a creek--one fork used for bathing and one for drinking. The high banks were selected for dwelling sites; the low banks for farmland. All of the land had to be high enough to dry out for planting.

"Probably fifty or sixty dwellings made up a town. The largest known Choctaw town was Coosa, in Lauderdale County. It had about 1200 residents, spread for miles.

"Summer houses were open and used just for sleeping. The small door was made of poplar planks. The houses were similar to the Seminole 'chickee.' Everything was kept in the winter houses. These houses were circular, made of logs stuck vertically in the ground, bound with vines, and plastered with mud. The houses had thatched roofs. (In this area, Johnson grass was used--about two acres of grass were needed per house). Farther south, palmettos were used. The fire was in the center of the dirt floor. The doorway entry was curved so that wind couldn't blow in. This also deterred the enemy from entering quickly.

"Around the inside of the house was a platform three feet high and three feet wide, used for sleeping. Skins were used for padding. Many times the Choctaws would use certain animal skins for their children, because they wanted the children to take on the characteristics of that particular animal. One reason beds were not on the floor was to keep the fleas from getting on the beds. Rushes covered the floors. One reason many artifacts are found is because items became lost in the rushes.

"Village populations were based on the number of warriors. A large village with 600-700 people may have had 250 warriors. A large village would have one, two, or three subsidiary villages, of around 200 people. I think that during this time period, a realistic number of warriors would be an average of 4,000.

"There was probably a central area for ceremonies at most sites. If the village was big and prosperous enough, there was a large winter house for 200-300 people to meet. In the summer, they met in open areas.

"Each family had their own weapons, and these were hung on the wall. Weapons used were war clubs, tomahawks, throwing sticks, and bows and arrows. The Whitemen's weapons were used by the mid-seventeenth century. The musket is an example.

"There were three districts and two moieties (tribal subdivisions)

at this time. People within each village had a headman--a village chief, plus three or four assistants. These individuals were first called 'honored men', then 'captains', later. Choctaw women had a voice in tribal decisions, which were completely democratic. Elections were by vote of the tribe, at the 'pleasure' of the tribe. Elected officials could be voted out.

"The Choctaws believed in a single God, described as the 'Great Giver of Breath.' They did not worship the sun, but it was considered God's eye. They believed in life after death. They condemned adultery, robbery, murder, etc. They also recognized 'little people' and demons.

"Agriculturally, each family planted an acre and put corn every three feet. Beans, squash, peas, and melons were planted among the corn. It is estimated the Choctaws could raise 250 bushels per acre and that they raised a surplus.

"There was a system of trails all over the Choctaw Nation--a myriad of trails between villages for constant commerce. The Choctaws were great travelers and had been to both coasts. Before the Whitemen, they traded stone, arrowheads, slaves, food, and pottery. After the Whitemen, they traded furs--mostly deerskins. Nearly everyone at that time wore buckskins. They traded with the English, French, and Spanish, for beads, tools, weapons, and cloth.

"In 1812, it was recorded that the Choctaws traded 38,000 deerskins during one season. Hunting began in October and continued all winter. Trading centers were in Mobile and Pensacola. A big trading center in this area was on the Tombigbee. When 'America' took over, trading was operated by the government. By the time the Choctaws left in 1832, they had better clothing, food, and shelter, much like the Whitemen."[14]

* * *

Following is an interview with Calvin Becton, a resident of Philadelphia, Mississippi, and a collector of Indian artifacts:

How did you become interested in finding village sites?

"There was a site near my house, and whenever farmers would plow through the field, they would uncover artifacts. I began collecting at that time, but became more interested after beginning work with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. I have pursued this interest since."

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[14]Interview with Thomas L. Goldman, Attorney at Law, Meridian, Mississippi, 30 January 1985

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Generally, where have you located village sites?

"Mostly in Lauderdale, Kemper, and Neshoba counties in Mississippi, and some in Choctaw County and other counties in Alabama."

How do you know where to look?

"Old maps are one of the best ways to begin. The French maps indicated a lot of village sites. Other maps have been made since the early French maps. Some of the survey maps can be used, but the survey lines on one map do not always agree with the survey lines on another map. Also, new survey maps do not always match old survey maps, so they offer some guidance, but are not always that reliable. It's beneficial to talk to farmers, especially those who walk behind the mules, chop cotton by hand, and really know the land. They would be the ones who would be close to the ground and see the artifacts when they were 'turned up.' As that kind of farming has passed, with more pasture land and tree farming, the clues from these people who work the soil become less and less available."

What "clues" lead you to a site?

"Geographical features are important. In order for the Indians to farm, the soil had to be sandy loam which was easy for them to turn over with simple tools. It was necessary to have a year-around water supply and to be in an area that was not frequently flooded. One example of a large village site that was near a spring, but no large creeks, was DeKalb. That was one of the largest Choctaw village sites in this area and the town of DeKalb has been built on that site. You also look for chips and shards, and over by Alabama, you will find shell mounds from the mussel shells that were gathered from the streams and discarded into the trash heaps."

How many sites have you discovered?

"Roughly ten, besides 'outlying' areas."

What are some of the artifacts that you have found?

"Copper arm bands that were trade items after the white settlers moved in, beads, and a stone face that was probably for ceremonial use. I found about two-thirds of it. It has got the eye holes, and a place for the nose to fit and so forth. There is a piece of bone that has eight embedded pearls. It is about the size of, well, in between a golf ball and a baseball. Kennith York and I were talking to a medicine man about the identity of this object, and the man told Ken a little about it. He told Ken that it belonged to a medicine man, but he wouldn't say much else. I

have also found weapons and weapon points. When I go to a site to dig, I take only a hunting knife or something like that, no shovels or any similar tools. I do not do any excavating; I look mainly for surface finds."

What unusual or interesting incidents have occurred while locating sites?

"I think the most unusual thing is the unpredictability of finds. Sometimes, I really anticipate finding a lot at a certain site and may find only two or three items; and sometimes, I won't be expecting much and find a lot buried under the top layer of dirt. At one site on the Little Yazoo River near the edge of Neshoba and Kemper Counties, there was a burial site. I was in red clay soil, and found these artifacts in a little patch of black soil which was presumably from a decomposed body. On the site, I found parts of a pocket knife, part of a flintlock, a flint, and the trigger mechanism from a flintlock gun, two mini-ball bullets that had been shot, one blue bead, and one white bead. According to talk, the blue beads were to be worn only by important people, like chiefs or medicine men.

"At Imoklasha, I spent a year digging with my knife and found a layer of black soil that marked a house site that had burned, as was indicated by the charcoal layer. It was approximately sixteen by twenty feet, and right in the center was a rock-lined fire bed that was still intact.

"I know of two sites where the Choctaws got clay for their pottery. One was at Tucker [one of the seven Choctaw Reservation communities] and one was on the West Yazoo River. The one on the Yazoo still has trails visible where you could see that the people had gone down to get their clay. They had gone there for quite awhile, because the trails were really well worn. Another site that has been owned by the same family since settlement, was where the Choctaws came for camping and stickball. The name of this place in Choctaw means 'Big Canebrake.' It was probably a source of cane for the baskets and blowguns, and probably the families came there to camp and play stickball."

What do you do with the artifacts that you discover?

"I do not give the artifacts away; I keep them on display. At one time, I had a little museum, but a tornado in April, 1981, came through and rolled the building used for the museum about two hundred yards. This messed up the classification. I had a different showcase/container for each site collection. Presently, I have an artifact house/museum in my backyard; and although I know from which site each collection belongs, I need to finish my reclassification."

Do you keep maps and records of your searches?

"I do not keep maps. I do keep track of where and when I find things. I have been at this hobby for thirty to forty years. Many times, I find arrowpoints and artifacts that I don't know what they were used for. In many instances, arrowheads were used as money. Because Mississippi does not have many deposits of useable flint, most of the green stone and most of the flints that are found here, were traded into this area. They came from Tennessee and other areas."[15]

* * *

The Choctaw "village" scene in Mississippi, although altered by the inevitable "touch" of time, progress, and necessity, has still retained much of the past. Traditions and customs compliment the surroundings, and the Choctaw language prevails.

Claiborne records that the Choctaw "tribe had a great pride of race. The warrior's proudest boast was Chah-ta-se-a-ho-cut-ba [Chahta sia hoke].[16] I am a Choctaw!" This pride is still very much alive!

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[15] Interview with Calvin Becton, Choctaw Tribal Employee, Philadelphia, Mississippi, 20 December 1984.

[16] J F H Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, p. 506.

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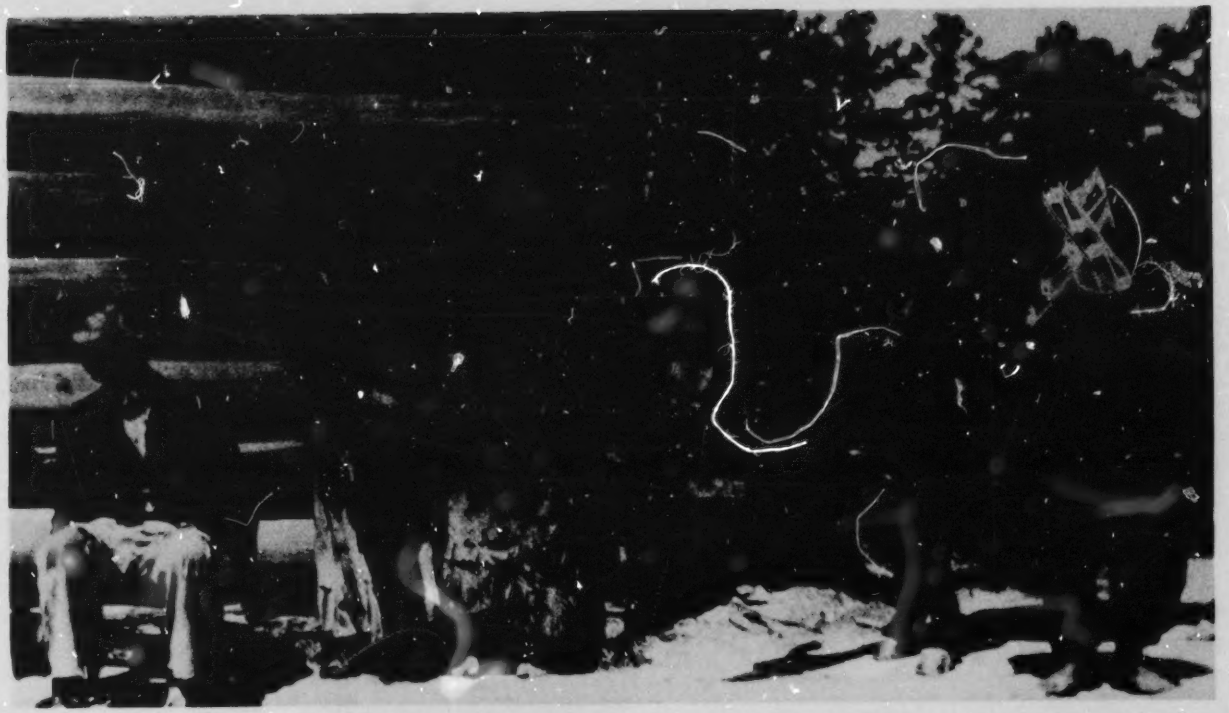

Log House, Choctaw; John Wesley and family near Philadelphia, Mississippi; John Swanton, Bureau of American Ethnology Collection / Reprinted by permission Smithsonian Institution

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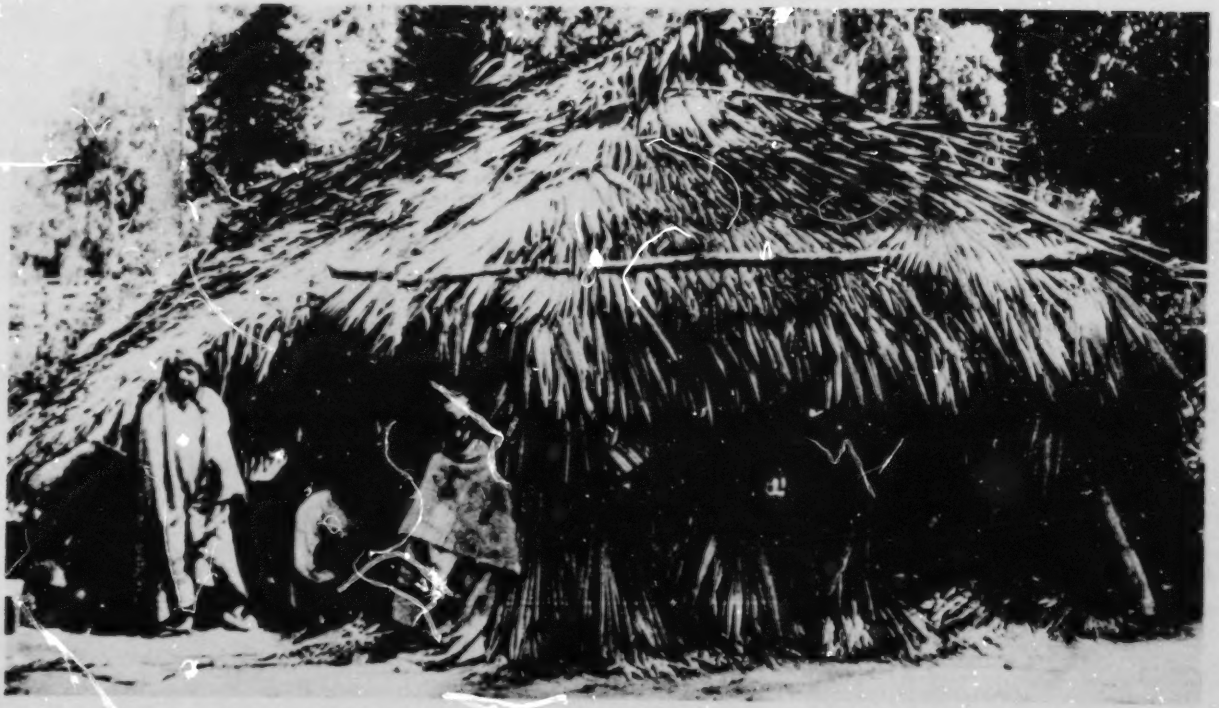

Palmetto house, Choctaw; Shore of Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana, circa 1881 / Reprinted by permission Smithsonian Institution

Thomas L. Goldman, Attorney-at-Law, Meridian, Mississippi / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Calvin Becton, Choctaw Tribal Employee, Philadelphia, Mississippi / Photo by Bill Brescia

"The letters C, E, W, and S placed after the names of towns indicate the division in which the author of that particular list has placed them, whether Central, Eastern, Western, or Sixtown (i. e., Southern). After names given on the authority of Bernard Romans, (M) indicates one taken from his map, (N) one from his narrative, and (WFM) one from a West Florida Map supposed to have been based, at least in part, on his notes."

CHOCTAW TOWNS—Continued

Southern or Sixtown Division

Name and meaning	Location	Doc. of 1764	Romans's Map & Narr. 1771	Journal of Liéut. du Roullet (1792)	Spanish List of 1784
1. Nathobawaya, "howling wolf"	S. W. part of Jasper Co.	Natcoulacoussis (S)	Nathonjaways	Nachou lamassis (W)	Nachuw lamaya (S)
2. Oskelagna, "yellow cane"	Probably in Jasper Co.	Oskeingana (S)	Oskalagna	Oske laguna (W)	Uoque laguna (S).
3. Tala, "palmetto"	S. part of Newton Co., between Turlow and Bogue Folamma Creeks.	Tala (S)	Tallaw	Tala (W)	Tala (S).
4. Sinnasha, "sycamore place"	Uncertain	Sinnachas (S)	Sinnishaw (WFM)	Sanaacha (W)	Sonacha (S).
5. Bok'tolokni, "little two-streams"	On Bogue Chitukbi Cr., a S. W. affluent of Chickasawhay R.	Bocktoucoulouny (S)	Buctalusaw		
6. Couyana, Couyana (or Toomana). (This and the five above were the original six towns).	Unknown. Probably identical with No. 1				
7. Inkillis tamaha, "English town" (as the chief of Coumana (No. 6) was a strong partisan of the English, it is probable that this and No. 6 are identical).	N. E. part of Jasper Co.				Yngles tamaha (S).
8. Chickasawhay (Du Roullet says from the name of a bayou).	On Chickasawhay R., about 3 m. S. of Enterprise, Clarke Co.	Tehikachalé (S)	(Chickasawhay R.)	Chichaché (W)	Chinchue (S).
9. Yowani (Choc. halyowani, "June bug").	E. side of Chickasawhay R., in the S. part of Wayne Co.	Kousané (S)	Kwany	Youanne (W)	Yoanni (S).
10. Taispotta, "palmetto (where two bayous) unite"—Du Roullet.	Jasper Co.	Taipa Ftoka (S)	Talpahaka	Tala pookta (W)	Teulaya (S).
11. Chikilikbasha, "blackjacks in a row."	Probably in Jasper Co.	Thalibaloba (S)	Chikalikbatcha		Enalibaha (S).
12. Pushunlakali, "child hanging".	S. W. corner of Kemper Co. or the proximate part of Nashoba Co.	Pouscouch Jacala (S)	Fousoon ta Kala (S)	Pouscoutla Pakalé (W)	Pousca lacala (S).

John R. Swanton, Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians, pp. 58-75.

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12. Bisuaba, "blackberry plum." (If the forms Boyasbe and Vasbe could be relied upon Du Roulet's interpretation, "mulberry plum," would be correct.)	W. side of Little Rock Cr., in Newton Co., sect. 22, tp. 8, range 12 E.	Boyasbe (S)	Nishoya	Bisaba (W)	Busaba (S).
14. Oktak chito tamaha, "big prairie town."	Unknown	Oktakchilotamaha (S)			Octacchito (S).
15. Oktakchinah'li (abbr. Chinahli), "snake prairie."	6½ s of Garlandville, Jasper Co.		Oiakchenaha (W P S)		
16. Bishkwa	N. part of Jasper Co.				Biscuane (P).
17. Okaiokla, "spreading (or stagnant) water."	E. part of Leake Co. or W. part of Jasper Co.				
18. Coataw (a map name evidently misspelled, and probably identified with that of another town of this group, perhaps Tala).	c.n. S. W. of the town of Newton, in sect. 17, tp. 4, range 11 E., Newton Co.		Coataw		
19. Sakti tamaha, "bluff town"	Unknown				Sacte tamahá (S).
20. Sachasa, perhaps "notched stick."	do				Sachasa (S).
21. Shomotakali, "town (or thickly-down) hanging."	Unknown (there was another town of this name, No. 98).				Chamon tamalá (S).
22. Tlamahla (perhaps from tlakbish "blue jay").	Unknown				Thoma bla (S).
23. Chunkalaya, "long house"	do				Chuna falaya (S).
24. Osiacha, perhaps "where there is a brush arbor."	do				Osiacha (S).
25. Osapa chito, "big fish"	Unknown (there was another town of this name, No. 62).				Osapachito (S).

CHOCTAW TOWNS—Continued

CENTRAL DIVISION

Name and meaning	Location	Doc. of 1764	Romans's Map & Navy 1771	Journal of Hitrle de Roullet (1732)	Spanish List of 1784
26. Kunshak, "cane (town)." The cane is that from which knives were made.	Last Horn Cr., 4 m. S. E. of Lauda, Lauderdale Co.	Conshaw (W)	Coosa	Coosha (C)	
27. Kunshak chito, "big cane (town)."	On or near the upper course of Okhibbehe Cr.				
28. Kunshak holukta, "round cane brake."	In the S. W. part of Kemper Co., some 2 m. from the Neshoba Co. line, and 10 from the Lauderdale Co. line.	Conshabouloukta (W)	Coosak Bolongtaw (N)		Coosha holueta (S).
29. Okshuna, "black water"	In Romans's time on White's Br., Kemper Co.	Okhlocoussa (W)	Oaka Loosa (M), Oka Loosa (N).	Okhlousa (C)	Ocushua (E).
30. Bukhiyia, "long creek" (a village dependent on No. 29) but classed by De Roullet with the West towns).	Uncertain	Boukaiaya (W)		Bouk hiaya (W)	Bukaya (E).
31. Iyanabé, "ironwood"	On Yanashba Cr., about 8 m. S. W. of De Kalb, Kemper Co.	Ayanabé (W)	Ayanabé	Ayanabé (C)	Yanaba (E).
32. Kowah chito, "a great league" ("because it was a great league in circuit").	N. W. of De Kalb, Kemper Co.			Coat tahitoa (C)	
33. Bukitokalo, "two creeks"	Unknown				
34. Bukitokalo chito, "big two creeks."	At the confluence of Running Tiger and Nokonahiba Creeks, about 4 m. N. W. of De Kalb.	Boukitoukoukita (E)	Bogue Tooca chitto	Bouk tacoualoa (C)	Bucteuela (S).
35. Lukfata, "chalk," "white clay"	Headwaters of one of the prongs of Bryanahiba Cr.	Loukfeeula (E)	Lukfa	Loukfeata (C)	Loufeula (E).
36. [illegible], "the watermelon [illegible]"—De Roullet (tr. ishkanpa "a disaster").	Probably on Running Tiger Cr., Kemper Co.		Shumapaw	Schkoumpa (C)	

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Western Division

37. Wast Eunshak chito (contr. West Conguto), "west big cane town."	Nashoba Co., near the headwaters of Okhibasha Cr.		West Conguto or Cross-shoto.		
38. Abina ("village of the mulberries"—Du Roulet; from ibbi, "mulberries," and aba, "are there").	Unascala	Abina (W)		Abina (W)	Bonabacha (W).
39. Yanoo, or West Yanoo	Nashoba Co., near the headwaters of Okhibasha Cr., in sections 13 and 24, tp. 10, range 13 east.	Yanoos de L'ouest (W)	West Yanoo	Jashoo (W)	Yanoo (W).
40. Imoklusha, "their people are there" (name of one of the moieties).	On the headwaters of Tukabo Cr., Nashoba Co., in sections 4, 9, and 16, tp. 9, range 13 east.	Immongoulusha (W)	West Imongalusha	Mongoulusha (W)	Mongoulusha (W).
41. Kashtaloba, "place of fleas" (often the residence of the chief of the Western Division).	S. side of Cuctusha Cr., about 3 m. a little S. of W. of West Yanoo Town.	Coustaloo (W)	Coctachee	Coutacha (W)	
42. Kaftalaia, "ceaseless thicket"	On Owl Cr., in sect. 21, tp. 11, range 12 E., Nashoba Co.	Kanstalays (W)	Kaftotalya	Caftitaloya (W)	Coh talaya (W).
43. West Abeka (fr. okhaka, "unhealthful place").	Undetermined	Abekoos (W)	West Abeika	Abeka (W)	
44. Utaperba, "rows of chestnut trees."	do			Outapouche (W)	
45. Onapa chito, "big (corn) field"	Flood Dixon P. O., Nashoba Co. (a second town so called; see No. 38).	Onapatchito (W)	Onpa Chitto		Onapachito (W).
46. Okchanoa tamaha, perhaps "town in a triangle marked out by streams of water."	Unknown	Okchanoatamaha (W)			
47. Okmk talak, "hickory grove"	Near the line between Nashoba and Kemper Counties.	Okmktalaya (W)	Onuktalaya		Ochertalaya (W).
48. Chunky, perhaps referring to the chunkey game.	On the site of Union, Newton Co.	Thonka (W)	Chunki	Tchunkó (W)	Chunkó (W).
49. Chunky chito, "big chunkey"	W. bank of Chunky Cr., about half a mile below the confluence of that creek with Tukabo Cr. HalPart says this territory was later in the Sixtowns District.				

[1] Du Roulet confounds the word Imok with the word meaning "panther," which is identical in form.

CHOCTAW TOWNS—Continued

Western Division—Continued

Name and meaning	Location	Iber. of 1784	Romans's Map & Narr. 1771	Journal of Régis du Roullet (1732)	Spanish List of 1784
30. Hitchipoia, "little tree." Halbert says "earth other's children," but is probably wrong).	Between the headwaters of Chickasawhay and the Tombigbee.	Hitchipunta (W)		Ho chipunta (W)	Etue Cambuhi (W) (?).
31. Bok chito, "big creek"	Probably on Bogue Chitto, Neshoba and Kemper Counties.			Bouk tchitou (W)	
32. Ai-hi-tchitou (tchitou, "big")	Unknown				
33. Hashuk chuka, "grass house"	do			Achouk tchuka (W)	Achanchuba (?) (E).
34. Bok fo'ya, "about (or near) the creek." In 1784 it is placed in the Eastern Division.	do			Bouk fouca (W)	Bucpica (E) (or Bucjuca).
35. Tiwaia	do				
36. Fani tallemon, said to sig "land abounding in squirrels" (said by De Lusser to be a dependency of No. 50).	do			Pany tallemou (W)	
37. Okhabohaka, "people talking unintelligibly," as in a foreign tongue.	Unknown				
38. Oka hollo, "named (or beloved) water."	Probably on or near the mouth of Sucarnoochee Cr., which empties into Pukshin Cr., Kemper Co.	Okaullou (W)	Oka-hoolah	Oka oullou (W)	
39. Otak hinis (hinis, "long")	Unknown				
40. Hashuk homa, "red grass"	do				
41. Okhatomp, "our people," so called because on the Chickasaw frontier and fortified.	do				
42. Oni talowen, "where there are wild onions"—Du Roullet.	S. of Pinckney Mill, Newton Co. (possibly in the S. Division).	Ouay (W)	Oany	Ouni talowen (W)	Uni (W).
43. Oka capassa, "cold water"	About Pinckney Mill, in section 33, tp. 5, range 11 E., Newton Co (possibly in S. Division).		Oka Kapassa		

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66. Shinoh hoba, "lying in the road"	About 1 m. a little N. of E. of Philadelphia, Neshoba Co.		Sinkobe		Chunnenba (W).
68. Oka coopaty, perhaps "water where the biting is" (oka shehli).	On Conby Cr., Neshoba Co.		Oka Coopaty		Ogoompie (W).
68. Holumiowi aiha, "building place".	On the site of Philadelphia, Neshoba Co.		Alloon Lussashaw		Okoloosaha (W).
67. Lushapa, perhaps intended for Lurushka, "swamp edge (or border)."	Perhaps on Lusushka Cr., a tributary of Kentucky Cr., Neshoba Co.		Lushapa		
68. Oka chippa, perhaps from Oka shippa, "water run down," from a small supply of water.	Unknown		Oka Chippa		
69. Koushak coopa, "canebrake field."	Somewhere W. of West Imshlasha		Cousha Coompa		
70. Tunishaw, perhaps Tunih Pisa, "standing post."	Unknown		Tonishaw		
71. Cabea hoola	do		Cabea Hoola		
72. Okapoula	do		Okapoula		
73. Wishahli, "hanging loft" (or arbor), so named from a brush arbor under which three people were sometimes found.	About 1 m. S. of the De Kalb and Jackson road, Neshoba Co.			Ayoushka (C) (possibly only an alternative name for Ayanaha).	
74. Fani yakni, "spoiled country"	Unknown			Fany jakana (W)	
75. Shinoh chokfillum, "the desert-ed road"	do			Chunnuh Tchaukafim (W)	
76. Nita aiha, "bears' home" (already abandoned in 1722)	do			Nitasha (W)	
77. Bokupuk, probably "where there are slippery elms" (bukup).	do			Bokupouk (W)	
78. Ita cunnee, "hard wood"—De Bartlet.	do			Ita cunnee (W)	
79. Kinta ahi, "water where there are beaver," or "beaver there."	do			Kinta ahé (W)	
80. Nunih hoka chitto, "big stream"	do			Nunne kou tchitou (W)	
81. Okhatatalaia, "spreading pond".	In the Conshatta District of Newton Co. SW. corner sec. 11, tp. 7, range 10 east.				

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CHOCTAW TOWNS—Continued

Eastern Division

Name and meaning	Location	Doc. of 1764	Romans's Map & Narr. 1771	Journal of Rivière du Roullet (1722)	Spanish List of 1784
82. Hvshta okla, "fort place"	Site of De Kalb, Kemper Co.	Ohhtashaue (E)	Ohtasaw (M)	Oultasha (E)	Oloulousas (W).
83. Chishtaiyo (taiya=taisi, "to stand").	Unknown	Chishtaiyo (E)			
84. East Abeka (Abe=ebeta, "unbroken plain").	At the junction of Straight Creek with the Subunatchi, Kemper Co.	Abekaue de La Est (E)	East Abeika, East Abeeka, East Abecka.	Abeka (E)	Abeca (E).
85. Ibetap okla hikilini, "little eaters people."	At the head of the main prong of Yazoo Cr., Kemper Co.	Ebitipaugoulahatamili (E).	Ebita pascola ekatana		Ebitabagulachi (E).
86. Hunchuk ithpi, "cane-brake knob."	On Conehatk Cr., a tributary of Easterly Cr., Neshoba Co.	Conchitchpi (E)	Conchithpi		
87. Ilokfahka, "grass weed"	Near East Abeka, Kemper Co.	Idorhahko (E)	Etuck Chukka	Ito ouhtaho (E)	Ito Ochacé (E).
88. Ganga lusa, "field abandoned"	N. side of Blackwater Cr., Kemper Co.	Ganganlusa (E)	Sepassa (M), Sapo-Pouah (N).		
89. Yazoo hikilini, "little Yazoo"	Both sides of Yazoo Cr., between its mouth and the fork, 1 m. above.	Yarous de L'Est (E)	East Yazo Shatana	Jashou (E)	Yasu (E).
90. Ibetap okla okhe, "big eaters people."	Perhaps on Straight Cr., Kemper Co.	Ebitipaugoulaohke (E)	Ebita Pascola Chitto (M), Ebetap-oosola-che (N).	Ebitaupougoula (E)	Ebitabagula (E).
91. Imohlanke hikilini, "little band of relations." (See No. 48.)	On Flat Cr., the E. prong of Yazoo Cr., Kemper Co.	Immongoulaohaka-tanna (E).	Imongolusha Shatana (M), East Mola-Lassa (N).	Mongoulasha (E)	Mongulasha Esquatal (E).
92. Pashoosha, "where the geese sleep."—Du Roullet.	Unknown			Patcha nouse (E)	
93. Ai'hoosha, probably from alhpiki, "at or toward the end."	....do....				
94. Chuka lusa, "black house"	....do....				
95. Hashke okla, "wild goose crying."	On a flat-topped ridge between the Pointers and Blackwater Creeks, in Kemper Co.		Hamtah Ulah		Ashtoula (E).
96. East Hunchuk okhe (contr. East Congrato), "East big cane town."	Near Meaney, Kemper Co.		East Congrato		Couaha (E).

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97. Shomotahali, "moss hanging" (a second town so called; see No. 31).	Kemper Co., between the two head prongs of Blackwater Cr.	Chomontahali (W)	Chomontahali		Chomontacale (E).
98. Watoshale, "whooping crane".	Uncertain	Onatoolawla (W)		Onatoolawla (E)	
99. Panta, Du Ratlot says from pinol, "moss," referring to "white rats found in the prairies."	At head of Ponta Cr., Lauderdale Co.	Panthla (W)	Panthe (M), Panate (N).	Pantá (E)	Pantá (E).
100. Cutha aimothaw	Unknown		Cutha Aimothaw		
101. Oka oktahala, probably "between the waters."	Probably at the confluence of Potishik and Yanubbee Creeks, Kemper Co.		Oka Aktahala (M), Oka ottahkala (N).		
102. Nushkobe, "head" [1]	Perhaps on or near Potishik Cr., Kemper Co.		Nasoba		Nanohé (E).
103. Yakni ashukma, "good land"	Perhaps on Indian branch of Running Tiger Cr.		Yagna Shoogawa		Yagnee ashoomma (E).
104. Chuka hulla, "sacred (or beloved) house."	On the N. side of Sukenatcha Cr., somewhere between the mouths of Running Tiger and Straight Creeks, Kemper Co.		Chooa-hoola		
105. Cutki ushokma	Probably on or near the mouth of Porter's Cr., which empties into Potishik Cr., in sec. 30, tp. 10, range 17 E.		Cutki Ushokma		
106. Yanatoa	Probably in S. W. Kemper Co.		Yanatoa		
107. Ahamooka	10 m. from Sukenatcha Cr., Kemper Co.				

Towns Outside of the Original Town Cluster

113. [illegible] okutapa, the first word sig. "standing pine."	On the lower Tombigbee R.		Tookbully Ekutapa		Town of Tombehé (E)
114. Chinbo fuka, "among the post oaks."	On the site of Jackson, Miss.				
115. Shukbota, "opossum"	On the site of Columbus, Ala.				

[1] This was abandoned, whether permanently or not is uncertain, in 1768.

Those of quiet strength
Stride their ancestral homeland
Remembering when

CHAPTER 2

CHOCTAW CODE: A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST

Billy Hockett

Before removal,[1] the Choctaws were one of the largest and most advanced tribes of the Southeast. Their native homeland covered most of present-day Mississippi, a portion of western Alabama, and a portion of eastern Arkansas. They were known for their gentleness, intelligence, and peaceful ways. When wrongdoings occurred, they consistently followed a strong code of honor.

Prior to the advancement and influence of the Whitemen,

> the Choctaws . . . had no written laws, and their government rested alone on custom and usage, growing out of their possessions and their wants; yet was conducted so harmoniously by the influence of their native genius and experience, that one would hardly believe that human society could be maintained with so little artifice.[2]

The Choctaw code and forms of punishment were consistent, not questioned, and evidently considered just--everyone seemed to know there would be definite results to certain actions and choices; therefore, their justice was swift and effective.

Cushman says that the major crimes according to tribal law were "homicide, blasphemy, theft and adultery." Punishment of offenders consisted of "a mixed system of private and public punishment," depending on the offense. Public whipping and ridicule was punishment

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[1]The Choctaws lost their homeland in a series of land cession treaties: the Treaty of Doak's Stand, October 18, 1820; the Treaty of Washington City, January 20, 1825; and the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, September 27, 1830.

Charles J. Kappler, comp., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. 2* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1904), pp. 191-319.

[2]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, ed. Angie Debo (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), p. 190.

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for the crimes of theft, blasphemy, and adultery.[3] "Homicide and witchcraft were the only crimes punished capitally."[4] Evidence indicates that while robbery occurred, it was not a prevalent problem among the Choctaws: "The Choctaws never robbed nor permitted robbers to live among them."[5] One reason may have been the form of punishment that awaited the robber. A first offense resulted in fifty lashes; a second offense resulted in one hundred lashes; and a third offense resulted in "death by rifle."[6] Cushman continues:

> the rifle was invariably used as the instrument of execution, for the soul of the Choctaw who had been executed by hanging was regarded as accursed--never being permitted to join his people in the happy hunting grounds, but his spirit must forever haunt the place where he was hung.[7]

Whipping and Public Ridicule

A woman who committed adultery was subjected to either whipping or public ridicule, unless she belonged to a larger or a more noted family than did her husband.[8] If a woman ran away with someone's husband, she might receive thirty-nine lashes (the same fate awaited a man who ran off with someone's wife),[9] or she might be put in a public place and be "carnally known by all who . . . [chose] to be present, young and old. . . ." The same fate befell a woman who arrived as a stranger from "another town or quarter of the nation," and could not account for herself or her reason for being there. "This they call running through the meadow."[10]

Before the early 1800s when a law was passed to prevent it, "women sometimes killed their infants when they did not want to provide for them. . . . [One] who had been tried and convicted for killing her infant . . . was tied to a tree and whipped . . . until she fainted; and . . .

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[3]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, 1899, p. 496, cited by Arrell M. Gibson, "The Indians of Mississippi," vol. 1, ch. 3.

[4]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State* (Spartanburg, South Caroline: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), p. 488.

[5]Ibid., p. 228.

[6]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 86.

[7]Ibid., p. 158.

[8]Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, 1775, pp. 86-87, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931), p. 110.

[9]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 88.

[10]Bernard Romans, pp. 86-87, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, p. 110.

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her husband also received the same punishment for not restraining his wife. . . ."[11]

After the missionaries became established in the Nation, a mounted patrol, called the "light horsemen," was organized by Greenwood LeFleur and David Folsom. The duty of the "light horsemen" was to find and punish criminals.[12] When the offense warranted whipping,

> he who had been condemned to receive this punishment never attempted to evade it. He promptly presented himself near the church door, where, singularly enough, this punishment was inflicted. Before the hour appointed the neighborhood assembled, where they chatted and smoked, never refering [sic] to the matter in hand. The culprit was as gay and as free as any of them. Precisely at the moment designated the light horsemen would appear. The crowd then went into the church, closed the door and struck up a hymn. At the same moment the culprit would say, "I have come, I am ready;" he would strip off his shirt, elevate his hands, and, turning his back to the light horsemen, say "proceed." He was severely scourged with a hickory switch. When fifteen or twenty strokes had been given he would turn each side to receive the blows, uttering no word and manifesting no pain.
>
> When the blows ceased, the church door was opened, and the whole assembly marched out and shook hands with the sufferer, thus manifesting their appreciation of his fortitude, and the subject was then and there dropped forever.[13]

Blood-for-Blood Code

The Choctaws considered accidental killing or murder a crime of utmost seriousness, and this resulted in the implementation of ". . . their severest law of . . . blood revenge. . . . It was acknowledged among all, not only to be the right, but also the imperative duty of the nearest relative on the male side of the slain, to kill the slayer wherever and whenever a favorable opportunity was presented." Only rarely did the guilty one flee, but if this did occur, "any male member of the murderer's family . . . might become the victim of the avenger in blood. . . ." Once the relative's life was sacrificed, the murderer "could return without fear of molestation; but the name of coward was given to him--an appellation more dreadful and less endurable than a hundred deaths. . . ." A relative of the guilty one could request to be executed in

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[11]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 88.

[12]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, p. 505.

[13]Ibid., p. 506.

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the guilty one's place, but this, too, was a rare occurrence.[14] Cushman describes an instance when a mother offered to die in the place of her oldest son, who had killed an aged Choctaw man. According to the code, once she made the offer, and it was accepted by the victim's family, the son had no choice but to allow his mother her wish. For years after, he was "often taunted by the relatives and friends of the old man he had slain, with the accusation of cowardice." Not able to stand the taunts and not willing to risk "his eternal destiny" by taking his own life, he came up with an idea. He killed the son of the first man he had killed, dug his own grave, cleaned his rifle, sang the death song, and performed "the farewell shaking of hands of his relatives and friends present"; after which, "the sharp rifle crack that immediately followed told but too plainly that . . . [he] was dead."[15] Not only could relatives be substitutes, but "any one might take the place of the murderer, and in death of the substitute the law was satisfied, and the true criminal remained exempt."[16]

A Choctaw man had the responsibility to see that his brother, if he had killed a man, was at the appointed time and place set for the execution. Gregg reports an incident involving brothers that makes it clear the finality with which the code was obeyed: "When the day arrived, the murderer exhibited some reluctance to fulfill the pledge, when the other said to him, 'My brother, you are no brave--you are afraid to die--stay here and take care of my family--I will die in your place' whereupon he immediately attended the appointed spot, and was executed accordingly."[17]

Two travelers into the Choctaw Nation during the early nineteenth century recorded their observations of this rigid Choctaw code. The first account is by an English traveler:

> Fortescue Cuming observed . . . that if one Choctaw maimed or mutilated one another in a . . . fray, he lost his life. The guilty one was given a few days, or if necessary, even a few months to settle his affairs. At the end of the period the criminal must give himself up to the injured party, or one of his nearest relatives, who never failed to carry out the penalty to the fullest extent by shooting the offender.[18]

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[14]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, pp. 203-205.

[15]Ibid., pp. 205-208.

[16]Josiah Gregg, "Commerce of the Prairies," *Early Western Travels*, ed. R.G. Thwaites, vol. 20, pp. 311-312, cited in John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, p. 104.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Reuben G. Thwaites ed., *Early Western Travels*, 1748-1846, IV, *Cuming's Tour to the Western Country*, 1807-1809 (Cleveland, 1904), p. 287, cited by Orval H. Deweese, "The Mississippi Choctaws" (unpublished manuscript, Mississippi State University, 1957), p. 55.

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The second account is by an American traveler:

> Estwick Evans . . . became acquainted with the Choctaw tribe while visiting in Natchez. A few days before his arrival one . . . Choctaw killed another. He saw the Choctaw penal law in action when the guilty one immediately gave himself up to his fate which was death.[19]

Several historians recorded various incidents that attest to the strength and consistency of the Choctaw blood-for-blood code. Following are accounts from Claiborne, Romans, Bushnell, and Swanton.

Claiborne:

> Their criminal code was very simple--blood for blood. This may be illustrated by the story of Pi-in-tubbee, a young Choctaw brave, who lived in the present county of Winston. Shortly before the first emigration west, he quarreled with a warrior and killed him on the spot. He fled, but not so far that he did not know that he had to die, and that a day had been appointed when the Choctaws would assemble at a designated place, and he was expected to appear and surrender his life for the blood he had shed. The day came, and the people met on the crest of a hill overlooking the valley of the Nan-awy-yah, about a mile from the sacred mound. But the fugitive was not there, and the day was waning. At length, they perceived him rapidly approaching. There was general rejoicing, for to have been derelict would have been a disgrace to his clan, and one of his kindred would have had to die in his place. He excused his delay, that before his misfortune he had made a promise to attend a dance a long way off, and as it was his last on earth, he desired to keep it; that after it was over he had traveled night and day, and was now ready to die.[20]

Claiborne:

> In the winter of 1824 a party of Choctaws had been picking cotton for the planters near Rodney, and closed their labors with a frolic; . . . the men got drunk, and the women . . . concealed all the weapons they could get hold of, to prevent bloodshed. A quarrel sprang up between two young men. They were separated by the women. Next day at noon they were seen standing with their rifles twelve feet apart. They fired at the same moment and one fell dead. The survivor immediately seated himself on the ground, stripped off his shirt, with a piece of charcoal drew, the outline of a heart just over his own, and chanted the death-song. Then . . . his own brother, in pursuance of the Choctaw code, shot him through the heart, and thus terminated what would otherwise have become a family vendetta.[21]

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[19]Reuban G. Thwaites ed., *Early Western Travels*, 1748-1846, VIII, *Butterick's Voyages*, 1812-1819 and *Evan's Pedestrious Tour*, 1818, Cleveland, 1904, cited by Orval H. Deweese, "The Mississippi Choctaws" (unpublished manuscript, Mississippi State University, 1957), p. 56.

[20]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, p. 488.

[21]Ibid., p. 506.

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Romans:

It happened that a young Choctaw having done something deserving reproof, . . . was therefore chid by his mother; this he took so ill as in the fury of his shame to resolve his own death, which he effected with a gun; his sister as his nearest relation thought herself bound to avenge his death, and knowing the circumstances told her mother she had caused her brother's death and must pay for his life; the old woman resigned herself to her fate, and died by the hands of her daughter, who shot her with a gun which she had provided for the catastrophe.[22]

Bushnell:

One night two men who were really friends, not enemies, were dancing and drinking with many others, when they suddenly began quarreling and fighting; finally one was killed by the other. The following day after . . . the murderer realized what he had done, and knowing he would have to die, . . . went to the relatives of the murdered man and told them he was ready to meet his doom, but asked that he be allowed to remain with them about two weeks longer, as he did not want to miss a dance to be held within that time. To this they consented, and during the following days he was given many small presents, as pieces of ribbon, beads, and tobacco. He was treated by everyone . . . with the greatest respect and kindness; all endeavored to make his last days enjoyable. At last came the event on account of which his life had been prolonged and for three days and nights all sang and danced. The next day, just at noon, when the sun was directly overhead, was the time fixed for the execution. Shortly before that time his friends and relatives gathered at his house, where he joined them. All then proceeded to the cemetery, for the execution was to take place on the edge of the grave that he himself had helped to dig, in a spot he had selected. The murderer stood erect at one end of the grave, and with his own hands parted his shirt over his heart. Four of his male friends stood near with their hands on his shoulders and legs, to keep his body erect after death. His female relatives were on each side, and all were singing loudly. Soon he announced that he was ready. A relative of the murdered man advanced and, pressing the muzzle of a rifle against the murderer's chest, fired.[23]

Swanton:

A curious account of a murder, apparently grounded in jealousy, is thus related in detailing the proceedings of a congress of Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations opened at Mobile by John Stuart, the British agent, on December 3, 1771:

A party of hunters from Toussanna . . . had in [the] winter met a white man in the woods who had lost his way and was at the point of death for

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[22]Bernard Romans, pp. 87-88, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, p. 105.

[23]David I. Bushnell, Jr., "The Choctaws of Bayou Lacomb," St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana, Bulletin 48, p. 25, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, pp. 109-110.

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> want of nourishment, [and] the Indians had fed and taken great care of him, by which means he had recovered entirely. . . . After some days he joined another party of Choctaws, in order to return to the nation [when] . . . the person who had taken such care of him being offended, pursued and killed him. The agent insisted that the Indian who had done the deed be himself killed, and after a conference among themselves the Choctaw chiefs agreed to it.[24]

The Choctaws also enforced their "ancient law of retaliation" upon persons outside the Nation. "Some white hunters had wantonly murdered a peaceful Choctaw in the Chickasaw country, and the Choctaws, in accordance with their old custom, had satisfied the demands of justice by killing an innocent white trader." When Agent Dinsmore "demanded the life" of the Choctaw who had killed the trader, "a conference was called in September, 1812 . . . [where] this Council abandoned in principle the law of retaliation" because the Choctaws agreed to the "death of the Choctaw who had killed the trader"; however, the execution was cleverly delayed until after the white murderer was punished.[25]

After the establishment of the "light horsemen," the responsibility of punishing murderers was shifted from private and personal to the "light horsemen." When a murder was committed, they gathered testimony and if one

> was found guilty of wilful and malicious murder, they announced the verdict and appointed the time and place of execution. They never arrested the . . . [guilty one], and he never failed to appear. He repaired to the grave that had been already dug, knelt by the side of it, made a target on his naked breast for the executioner, was instantly shot, the grave filled up, and he was never mentioned afterwards.[26]

"The custom of leaving the murderer to be disposed of as the relatives of the deceased saw proper, was then set aside, and the right of trial by the light horse who acted in a three fold capacity--sheriff, judge, and jury was awarded to all offenders." They were "composed of a brave and vigilant set of fellows, and nothing escaped their eagle eyes. . . ."[27]

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[24]"English Dominions," Mississippi State Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, p. 106.

[25]Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), pp. 39-40.

[26]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, p. 505.

[27]Ibid., p. 157.

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Witchcraft

After missionary contact, changes occurred in the Choctaw view of witches.[28] Swanton says that "witchcraft was punished with death no less than murder, but the two seem to have been closely associated in the native mind. . . . "[29] One of the early missionaries, Cyrus Kingsbury, was prompted to deliver a "sermon against the belief in witchcraft" after an incident resulted in two deaths. A "doctor" predicted the recovery of a Choctaw girl, but when she died, it was decided that "her sudden demise was the result of a . . . witch ball shot from an invisible rifle in the hands of a witch" whereupon the dead girl's father killed the accused witch.[30] Debo suggests that an incident witnessed and related by Adam Hodgson may have been the continuation of the preceding situation. He "saw fifty or sixty Choctaws assembled in the woods to avenge the death of a woman who had been killed as a witch."[31]

In 1829, the Choctaws established a law enabling a person who had been accused of witchcraft the opportunity of a trial.

> Whereas, it has been an old custom of the Choctaws to punish persons said to be wizzards [sic] or witches with death, without giving them any fair trial by any disinterested persons; and many have fallen victims under the influence of this habit--
>
> We do hereby resolve; in general council of the north, east, and southern districts, that, in future, all persons who shall be accused of being a wizzard or witch, shall be tried before the chiefs and committees, or by any four captains; and if they be found guilty, they shall be punished at the discretion of the court.
>
> Be it further resolved, that if any person or persons shall find at any place the entrails of a wizzard or witch, the said entrail going from or returning to the body, the said body shall be put to death at the place where it may be discovered, and the said body shall be cut open, by a proper person, and an examination be made to see whether it has in it any entrails, and a report be made of said body.
>
> And it is hereby further resolved, that no doctor shall have the power to pass sentence of death upon any person or persons that may be accused of being a wizzard or witch: and any doctor so offending shall suffer the penalty of death.

It is interesting to note that the wording of the above council-

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[28] Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, p. 46.

[29] John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, p. 110.

[30] H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, pp. 74-75.

[31] Adam Hodgson, *Letters from North America*, Vol. 1, London, 1824, cited in Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, p. 46.

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established law combines "primitive beliefs and customs of the tribe" with the "borrowed phraseology of Anglo-American legal procedure."[32]

Suicide

Along with these definite, well-established views of punishment by honorable death, the Choctaws had explicit views about suicide. Suicide was viewed as an abhorrent act; and yet, a form of suicide, through duels, was considered honorable and acceptable. An early missionary, Israel Folsom described such duels: A quarrel or disagreement between two warriors would often result in the challenge of one by the other. The ensuing duel really meant death for both, and through dying, each warrior proved his bravery and the possession of "an honest and sincere heart." If one of the challenged should back out, he would be considered cowardly and dishonest. There was a "common saying among them, that a man should never quarrel, unless he was willing to be challenged and to die." After the challenge was verbally given, face to face, the time and place were designated; and each of the challengers, along with their seconds, met. "The two combatants then took their places unarmed about twenty feet apart, each with a second at his right side with a rifle in hand. At a given signal, each second shot the combatant standing before him. That closed the scene."[33]

Destiny of the Spirit

Perhaps the Choctaw belief in the destiny of one's spirit involved in death by murder furthered the bounds of the code. They believed the soul entered a

> land of delight, ever warm, ever illumined by the beams of a vernal sun, and ever spontaneously pouring forth its varied productions in rich profusion. . . . Here was a continued succession of dancing games, and plays, and thus they glided sweetly away in one continued scene of festivity and mirth. To enter this land of delight, no amendment of the life was necessary, and none were excluded from a participation of its pleasures, except those who had committed murder of the most aggravated kind. . . .
>
> Close to this happy land, and within sight of it, was the place to which ghosts of murderers went at death. By some uncontrollable destiny, they were unable to find the bright path, which led to the land of the blessed, but were compelled to take another road . . . to . . . their destination. Here,

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[32]Niles Register, XXXVII, Baltimore, Maryland, 1829, p. 181, cited by Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, pp. 46-47.

[33]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, pp. 142-143.

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though in view of the happy land, they had no share in its pleasures. . . .[34]

Thus was the believed fate of murderers. Unfortunately, a similar fate awaited the victims. According to Bushnell, "persons dying by violent deaths involving loss of blood, even a few drops," did not go to the land of delight, "regardless of the character of their earthly lives, or their rank in the tribe. . . ."[35]

After removal from Mississippi to Oklahoma, the Choctaws established a "comprehensive law code out of a curious mixture of English law and . . . [primitive] custom." Prior to their departure from Mississippi, they initiated two principles that were to become the basis of their legal system.

> When they instituted the light horsemen . . . they accepted the principle that law was a matter of tribal concern rather than private revenge. When they began to modify their ancient customs by decisions of their warriors in council, they recognized the legislative character of their legal code.[36]

As with any civilization, changes brought about by time and trends affected the Choctaw code. After 1830, the death penalty was used for "murder, rape (second offense), robbing with dangerous weapons, and treason." In 1834, the "killing of a witch or wizzard" was considered murder. In 1839, treason was defined as "the act of a chief, captain, or citizen in signing a sale of Choctaw land."

> Among other crimes were theft, arson, selling intoxicating liquor, perjury, forgery, polgamy, adultery, gambling or bringing cards or any gambling device, disturbing religious services, bribery, carrying pistols, skinning dead animals on the range, disturbing the peace, and defacing public buildings.[37]

Today, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians strives to serve justice to all of its members. This is brought about, in part, through the development of the Choctaw Tribal Code, through the appointment of judges who are tribal members, and through tribal control of Choctaw Law and Order. Still one of the largest and most advanced tribes in the Southeast, they continue their quest. . . fortified in their endeavors through the strength of the law.

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[34] *The Missionary Herald*, Boston, 1828, pp. 182-183, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, p. 216.

[35] David I. Bushnell, Jr., "The Choctaws of Bayou Lacomb," pp. 28-29, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, p. 220.

[36] Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, p. 76.

[37] Joseph P. Folsom, *Digest of Choctaw Law*, pp. 485, 487, 493, 501, cited by Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, p. 177.

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Choctaw Law and Order facility, Pearl River Community / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Vision quests fulfilled
Through spiritual rebirth
Perpetuate peace

CHAPTER 3

NINETEENTH CENTURY MISSIONARY EFFORTS AMONG THE CHOCTAWS

Katrina Alex

The British policy governing the area between the Mississippi River and the Alleghanies, land acquired by the British with the Treaty of 1763, made no provisions for missionary work among the Indians. James Adair, an Englishman who traded with the Indians for forty years, deplored the "British neglect of the Indians" in this regard. Adair advised the British government of the type of missionary the Indians needed, voicing much concern over the evils already experienced by the Indians under immoral and uneducated clergymen.[1]

The Great Awakening, a period of religious revival in the middle eighteenth century, followed by the Great Revivals sixty years later, "forged the framework" for missionary endeavors. By 1800, emphasis was on "personal piety" and the masses, including Indians, Negroes, and other underprivileged people, not just for the "New England Congregationalists."[2]

Another factor that influenced the establishment of missions for the Indians was a law passed by Congress in March, 1819. This law, entitled "An Act making provisions for the civilization of the Indian tribes adjoining the frontier settlements," provided financial support for missions, which "no doubt encouraged the Missionary Board to undertake missionary work among the Indians." To qualify for this support, missions had to teach the girls domestic arts and the boys mechanical arts.[3]

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[1]Percy L. Rainwater, "Indian Missions and Missionaries," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 28 (February 1966): pp. 15-17.

[2]Ibid., p. 18.

[3]Ibid., pp. 19-20.

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According to Peterson, the Choctaw Nation in its "strategy for survival," was aware that an educational program for the Choctaws was imperative. Interest by the Choctaws in an educational program was at a time when "Secretary of War, Calhoun, had urged Congress to provide for Indian education. . . ." In 1818, the Choctaws requested that a mission station be established at Eliot, located on the Yalobusha River. The Choctaw Council supported Choctaw education by allotting "a major portion of its annuity" when federal funds were not sufficient. Early missionary attempts by the French had not been successful. The Choctaws also had resisted Protestant missionaries until they were convinced that the missionaries were as interested in "providing education and training as in converting them to Christianity."[4]

When the missionaries went among the Chickasaws and Choctaws, the Indians had already begun abandoning their old ways of "roaming and hunting" and had begun farming and raising cattle. The Choctaws and Chickasaws wanted their children to be taught "the white man's way," and welcomed the missionaries.[5]

In May, 1818, Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury of the mission at Brainerd, near Chattanooga, in the Cherokee Nation, was requested by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (jointly managed by the Presbyterians and Congregationalists), to go into the Choctaw Nation to establish a mission. His experience and knowledge of the "Indian character" were factors in this request. Mr. and Mrs. Loring S. Williams, also of the mission at Brainerd, and a Mr. Ladd, a hired man, left Brainerd May 25, and traveled by flat-bottomed boat "down the Tennessee River for Colbert's ferry where they arrived on June 6." Rev. Kingsbury left Brainerd May 30, after the Williams party had embarked, but arrived at Colbert's ferry the same day as the Williams group. Kingsbury went ahead to the Yalobusha settlement, then under control of Captain Perry, a half breed. "The settlement was composed largely of half breeds, some of whom were owners of negro slaves." The Williams party, with the help of Kingsbury and Captain Perry who had set out to meet them, arrived at the Yalobusha settlement on June 27, 1818.[6]

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[4]John H. Peterson, Jr., "The Choctaws in Mississippi, the Pascagoula, Acolapissa, and Bayogoula" (unpublished manuscript, Mississippi State University), pp. 47-48.

[5]Percy L. Rainwater, "Indian Missions and Missionaries," p. 20.

[6]*Panoplist and Missionary Herald*, 1818, vol. 14; *Panoplist and Missionary Herald*, 1819, vol. 15, cited by Henry S. Halbert, "The Introduction of Christianity and Education into the Choctaw Nation," Chapter 12, Folder 145, *Henry Sale Halbert Collection*, Alabama State Archives, pp. 1-5.

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Captain Perry provided a house in his yard for the missionaries, who were "most hospitably received." On June 28, the next day, the first Protestant services ever held in the Choctaw Nation were performed. This service was attended by "half breeds, two white men and the negro slaves."[7]

A site was chosen for the mission station, which was to be named "Elliott,[8] in honor of the noted Apostle of the American Indians. It was located about two miles from Yalobusha River, about thirty miles above its influx into Yazoo River and in the present Grenada County, Mississippi." The missionaries "were unwearied" in their work with the Indians, and directed their energies for many months toward erecting mission buildings.[9]

> On March 28, [1819] after solemn fasting and prayer, the first missionary church was organized at Elliott; consisting of ten members, the entire missionary party, men and women. Pending the completion of the regular school house, on April 19, a school of ten pupils was opened in one of the rooms of the Mission house. Some of the pupils were from families living in distant parts of the nation.[10]

A mill, storehouses, and stables were completed by mid-summer. In August, Dr. William Pride, a physician, arrived at the mission, along with a blacksmith and farmer, Mr. Isaac Fisk. Other buildings and shops were erected, and "soon furniture, wagons, and all kinds of agricultural implements were made at the mission. Its future was now secure."[11]

In 1820, "Apuckshunnubbee and Moshulatubbee, with seven chiefs, visited Eliot and were highly elated at the progress of the pupils. . . ." At that time, the Choctaw country was divided into three districts,

> known as the western, northeastern and southern, called Upper Towns, Lower Towns, and Six Towns. Each district had a ruling chief, and each town a subordinate chief, captain, and warriors, who managed the local affairs of the people. Eliot was located in the western district, over which, at that time, Pushmataha was the ruling chief; Mayhew, in the northeastern, over which Apuk-shunnubbee was the chief and Moshulatubbee of the southern.[12]

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[7]Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[8]This alternate spelling of "Eliot" was left untouched and is recorded as found in quoted sources. According to Cushman, History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians, p. 71, the mission was named for Rev. John Eliot, the distinguished missionary who worked with the Indians of the New England States.

[9]Ibid., pp. 7-9.

[10]Ibid., p. 10.

[11]Ibid., p. 11.

[12]H. B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, ed. Angie Debo (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), pp. 77-78.

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Mr. Kingsbury left Eliot in 1820 to establish another mission. David Folsom voluntarily assisted Mr. Kingsbury in selecting "a proper situation for the contemplated mission." Joined by Major John Pitchlynn, Kingsbury and Folsom

> . . . selected a place for the mission station on a high point overlooking a grand prairie towards the south and west, and on the south banks of a stream flowing into a stream now known as Tibi (corruption of the Choctaw word It-tib-ih--to fight or having fought), where they at once erected a camp, preparatory to the establishment of the missionary station--to which Mr. Kingsbury gave the name Mayhew. . . .[13]

Halbert records that the site was "on the South side of Oktibbeha creek overlooking an extensive prairie to the South." Mr. Kingsbury, with some laborers he had employed, began building a camp for shelter until a "suitable house" could be built. Because of storms and rains, "it was several weeks before the mission house was completed." On March 23, 1820, "a day of great rejoicing, Mr. Kingsbury moved into . . . [the mission house], having lived [illegible] weeks in the wet smoky camp." Mr. Kingsbury returned to [illegible] later having made "arrangements for opening of a garden, a cornfield and the building of cowpens."[14]

> This second mission among the Choctaws was named Mayhew, in affectionate remembrance of Mr. Mayhew and his descendents, missionaries among the Indians on Martha's Vineyard. Mayhew mission was situated in the northeastern corner of . . . Oktibbeha county [Mississippi], and half a mile from Lowndes county on the east and the same distance from Clay county on the north."[15]

The establishment of another station and another school, "echoed and re-echoed throughout the [Choctaw] Nation" and applications from "various parts of the Nation" were made for stations and schools. Councils were held and appropriations made for "churches, schools, blacksmith shops, etc., and in 1820, annuities were appropriated . . . to the amount of six thousand dollars annually to run for sixteen years. These annuities were for large tracts of land sold by the Choctaws to the United States."[16]

Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury, along with Mrs. Kingsbury, Rev. Alfred Wright, and Dr. Pride, moved to Mayhew in the fall of 1820, to make it their permanent home. Rev. Kingsbury retained "superintendence" of

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[13]Ibid., pp. 76-77.

[14]*Panoplist and Missionary Herald*, 1820, vol. 16; *Missionary Herald*, 1821, vol. 17, cited in Henry S. Halbert, "The Introduction of Christianity and Education into the Choctaw Nation," pp. 18-20.

[15]Ibid., p. 20.

[16]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 77.

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Eliot Mission. By April 1, 1821, "ten buildings had been erected and nearly completed at Mayhew and a field of seventy acres opened. On May 6, with impressive ceremonies, the first church was organized at Mayhew. . . ." A small school was "conducted" during 1821 for Indian children, "which by the spring of 1822 grew to be a school of large size."[17]

The closing exercises of the first session of the Mayhew school were attended by many parents and friends, who were "delighted at the improvement of their children." Chief Mushulatubbee attended with many of his chieftains and warriors, and made the following remarks:

> Such a thing was not known here when I was a boy. I had heard of it, but did not expect to see it. I rejoice that I have lived to see it. You must mind your teachers, and learn all you can. I hope I shall live to see our councils filled with the boys who are now in this school, and that you will then know much more than we know and do much better than we do.[18]

According to Claiborne, missionary schools were "well attended, and contrary to expectation the pupils were found extremely docile and subordinate." Parents visited the school frequently and often talked to the students about the advantages they had over their forefathers.[19]

Missionary chapels were crowded with Choctaws who "never tired of listening to the narrative of the redemption. . . ." The women "arranged" themselves on one side of the chapel; the men on the other side. The preacher, with his interpreter, if needed, stood in front of the assembly.

> At the end of every sentence the men would exclaim Yum-ma! (very good.) Now and then, a warrior would quietly leave the church, and in a few moments return with his capacious pipe filled with tobacco and sumach [a plant of the cashew family], resume his seat, draw a few whiffs and pass it to his neighbor, and so the pipe traveled round until its contents were exhausted. Then he, who had been favored with the last puff, silently withdrew, replenished it, returned, and the pipe thus went round til the exercises were closed.[20]

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[17] *Missionary Herald*, 1821, vol. 17; *Missionary Herald*, 1822, vol. 18, cited by Henry S. Halbert, "The Introduction of Christianity and Education into the Choctaw Nation, pp. 43-43.

[18] H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 84.

[19] J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), p. 504.

[20] Ibid.

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The Choctaws heard, "with amazement, the story of the cross and the atonement." It was their own creed for a man "to yield his life for the life he had taken, [or] for a friend to die for a friend." However, to die for an enemy was beyond the "eloquence of the missionary" for their understanding; "but it pleased God to enlighten their understandings, and they soon manifested an earnest faith, visible in their prayers, and in their lives and conversation." Hymns were sung by the Choctaws in their own language, although it was evident that some improvisations were made. Claiborne describes the voices of the Choctaw women as "low and sweet, corresponding with their gentle manner and modest deportment."[21]

At the time of the Removal, 1830, when the Choctaws were

> so cruelly driven from their ancient domains to make room for . . . "Progress," the Eliot and Mayhew missions together with eleven others established in various parts of the Choctaw Nation, were in flourishing condition; and this earliest effort to evangelize this worthy people was highly encouraging from the readiness, yea, absolute eagerness, on their part to receive instruction. . . . Many of the useful arts of civilized life were introduced; and the missionaries had gathered many Christian congregations of whom not a few had received the good seed in an honest heart.[22]

Debo records that as reported in Indian Affairs, Annual Reports, 1830, the Choctaw Nation had eleven schools, twenty-nine teachers, and "an enrollment of 260 children." Reading of their native language had been taught to 250 adults. The Choctaw Academy[23] had an enrollment of eighty-nine boys.[24] "Thus was established the educational system, that was to be the greatest pride of the Choctaws during all the rest of their tribal history."[25]

Visitors to the different communities that constitute the Reservation of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, will find numerous churches and missions on its grounds. The Choctaw Central Schools (Elementary, Middle, and High), and other community

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[21]Ibid., pp. 504-505.

[22]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 96.

[23]The Choctaw Academy was an academy for boys in Kentucky, established by the Baptists in 1825. It was in existence until 1841. (Debo, pp. 44-45.)

[24]*Indian Affairs*, Annual Report, 1830, Table B; *Indian Affairs*, Annual Report, 1829, cited by Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), p. 45.

[25]Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), p. 45.

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schools, directed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, are symbols of progress in Choctaw schooling.

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Choctaw Central High and Choctaw Central Elementary Schools, Pearl River Community / Photo by Bill Brescia

This strong heritage
Manifested through the young
Bequeathed by elders

CHAPTER 4

CHOCTAW LANGUAGE: AN OVERVIEW

Shirley Wilson

When Europeans made their first contact with native Americans, the goals of the settlers and explorers were not linguistic or anthropologic in nature. Therefore, "the only data of the Choctaw language prior to the early nineteenth century missionary efforts are both scanty and largely unreliable."[1]

Tribes in Mississippi at the time of "European intrusion" included the:

> . . . Acolapissa, Bayogoula, Biloxi, and Pascagoula on the Gulf, the Natchez on the lower Mississippi, the Chakchiuma, Choula, Houma, Ibitoupa, Koroa, Taposa, Tiou, and Yazoo on the Yazoo River and its tributaries, and the Tunica in northwestern Mississippi. The Choctaws occupied Mississippi's interior center and south, and the Chickasaws inhabited the north and northeast.[2]

The culture of the Mississippi tribes was similar, but language differences were significant. The Choctaws, numbering around 20,000, and the Natchez and Chickasaws, numbering about 4,500 each tribe, had a "common language heritage--Muskhogean." The language of the Choctaws and Chickasaws was "virtually the same", but the Natchez version was different. European visitors described the Muskhogean

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[1]Andrew Badger, "A Brief History of the Choctaw Language," *The Journal of Mississippi History* (February 1978): 49.

[2]John R. Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 137, quoted in Arrell M. Gibson, "The Indians of Mississippi," *A History of Mississippi* vol. 1, ch. 3 (Jackson, Mississippi: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1973), p. 69.

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language as "'very agreeable to the ears, courteous, gentle and musical . . . the women in particular so fine and musical as to represent the singing of birds.'" A written language did not exist among the tribes in Mississippi.[3]

In 1818, Protestant missionaries made a lasting impression on the Choctaws, and their condition improved. Instruction in agriculture and a written form of the Choctaw language were part of this growth. An alphabet "suggested by the Hon. John Pickering" was used. The first book printed was a spelling book, by the American Tract Society, in 1825.[4]

D.G. Brinton, M.D., editor of work by Rev. Cyrus Byington, refers to Byington as an "eminent scholar and missionary, whose name is inseparably connected with the later history of the Choctaw nation. . . ."[5] Byington worked diligently with the Choctaw language, with its difficult construction, to make it available for the "missionary and philological student." In 1834, Byington completed the first draft of his *Grammar*. He wrote and re-wrote this work, until he died in 1868, working on the seventh revision.[6]

Byington's own words, in 1864, record his views about what he had accomplished:

> The last year I revised the *Choctaw Grammar*, going over the ground twice. The last effort I hope is my best, and will be of use to learners of Choctaw, and to Choctaw scholars in schools, but it needs further revision, and then to be well transcribed. I commit these efforts in my old age to the Lord. I have enjoyed these labours very much. The pleasure of happily resolving difficulties in these studies, and of success in the work, is gratifying, and reviving to the mind.[7]

According to Brinton, *Grammar* "remains one of the most valuable, original and instructive of any [work] ever written of an American language." Byington devoted "nigh half a century" of study to

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[3]William Bartram, *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy and the Country of the Choctaws*, quoted in Arrell M. Gibson, "The Indians of Mississippi," *A History of Mississippi* vol. 1, ch. 3 (Jackson, Mississippi: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1973), p. 70.

[4]D.G. Brinton, ed., *Grammar of the Choctaw Language, by the Rev. Cyrus Byington* (Philadelphia: McCalla and Stavely, 1870), p. 3.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p. 5.

[7]Ibid.

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the task, and Brinton questioned whether any other person would ever devote such time or have the ability and opportunity, to analyze the language as Byington did. Byington also prepared a Choctaw dictionary that contained approximately 15,000 words. At the time of Brinton's edition, Byington's dictionary manuscript was in the possession of Byington's family.[8]

Albert James Pickett wrote a history of Alabama that contained sketches of Indians who occupied this territory before Mississippi and Alabama became states. According to George H. Ethridge, who cites Pickett in his article "The Mississippi Indians", the Choctaws had "orators of high skill whose imagery was excellent and whose metaphors were beautiful and forceful--forceful largely because they came from observation which others also had frequently made." Eloquence in speech was often a trait considered for leadership, in addition to bravery and wisdom.[9]

Pushmataha was a Choctaw chief whose eloquence in speech is historically recorded. According to Gideon Lincecum, Pushmataha possessed "the strongest and best balanced intellect of any man . . . [he] had ever heard speak . . . [in] forty years of great men and their written thoughts." When Pushmataha spoke at national councils, "quite a number of white men" in attendance would be "chained to their seats, for hours at a time although they understood not a word of his language. Such was the force of his attitude and expressive gesticulation. His figure, and elucidations were sublime beyond comparison."[10] Pushmataha was chief of the Southern District of the Choctaw Nation during the early nineteenth century.[11]

Historically, the Choctaws had several dialects. The most prestigious was "that of the Okla Falaya 'Long People' in the western part of Mississippi." The least prestigious was "that of the Okla Hannali[12] 'Sixtown People' in Newton and Jasper counties." Speech

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[8]Ibid.

[9]George A. Ethridge, "The Mississippi Indians", *Clarion Ledger*, Jackson, Mississippi, 26 February 1939.

[10]Gideon Lincecum, *Traditional History of the Chahta Nation, 1861* (University of Texas Library, 1932), Addenda, p. 7, "part collection, Neshoba County Library, Philadelphia, Mississippi."

[11]Herman J. Viola, *Thomas E. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830* (Chicago: The Swallow Press Inc., 1974), p. 127.

[12]Literal translation: okla--people; hannalih--six; tamaha--town
Thalia Lewis, Director of Bilingual Education, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 3 April 1985.

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variations existed not only between the Sixtown group and the others, but also "between the speech of the other parties, but in course of time, that of the western group, the Long people, came to be recognized as standard Choctaw.'"[13]

"According to Cyrus Byington, the dialectal differences between standard Choctaw and Sixtown Choctaw were 'confined mainly to certain words, involving but very slightly the language as a whole.'"[14] The Choctaw language was important, not only because the Choctaws were the largest linguistic group in the Muskogean family, but also because "Choctaw formed the basis for the lingua franca of the southeastern region."[15]

According to Badger in a 1978 publication, the majority of Mississippi Choctaws are "bilingual and moderately literate in English." He states that cultural patterns will, in future generations, be only curiosities and relics, if the Choctaw language is not retained and fostered.[16]

Thallis Lewis, a Choctaw tribal member, has worked with and among her people for many years in tribal educational programs. Two of these programs, Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language, involve language development, and this has enabled her to observe trends in the progression of language changes on the reservation.

Through contact with Choctaws of many ages, she has seen two phases or distinctions of speech emerge: One, the older Choctaws speak the Choctaw language "the old way." The entire word is pronounced and that pronunciation is the "old Choctaw language." Two, speakers, both young and old, combine Choctaw and English within a sentence. This will happen particularly with words that describe or belong to something in the non-Choctaw culture; for example, words associated with advanced technology.

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[13]John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103, quoted in Andrew Badger, "A Brief History of the Choctaw Language," *The Journal of Mississippi History* vol. 40, n. 1 (Jackson, Mississippi: The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1978), p. 50.

[14]*A Dictionary of the Choctaw Language*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 46, quoted in Andrew Badger, "A Brief History of the Choctaw Language," *The Journal of Mississippi History* vol. 40, n. 1 (Jackson, Mississippi: The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1978), p. 50.

[15]Ibid., p. 51.

[16]Ibid., pp. 58-59.

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Today, the students are caught in the dilemma of wanting to retain their Choctaw language, but yet they understand the necessity of speaking English. Because of this, many students do not speak "standard English," but rather a "Choctaw-flavored English."

Currently, Lewis has the privilege of observing language development personally and at close range. She has a granddaughter that is under one year of age. She and her daughter, Jane, talk to the baby daily, in both Choctaw and English. Words are spoken to the baby in one language and the same words are then repeated in the other language. Lewis is interested in watching the language development of the baby, and wonders which language she will choose to speak first.[17]

Following is a questionnaire developed for insight into current language practices as experienced and viewed by thirty-six Choctaw students.

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[17]Interview with Thalia Lewis, Mississippi Choctaw Tribal Member, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, Interview, 27 February 1985.

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SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your first language?
   Choctaw English
2. What is the dominant language in your home?
   Choctaw English

   Key for questions listed below:
   a = cannot b = some c = moderately d = fluently
3. How well can you speak Choctaw?
   a b c d
4. How well can you write Choctaw?
   a b c d
5. How well can you read Choctaw?
   a b c d
6. If you do not speak Choctaw, how well do you understand the language?
   a b c d
7. Do you think that bilingual courses should be offered at Choctaw Central High School?
   Yes No Why or why not?

   _____

   _____
8. Would you take a class taught in Choctaw?
   Yes No Why or why not?

   _____

   _____
9. Do you think that classes should be taught in Choctaw?
   Yes No Why or why not?

   _____

   _____
10. Is there an advantage or disadvantage to being bilingual?
    Advantage Disadvantage

    Why? _____

    _____

11. If you are bilingual, do you find the Choctaw language more precise than the English language?
    Yes No Why or why not?

    _____

    _____

12. If you are bilingual, do you feel that the Choctaw language interferes with English language pronunciation?
    Yes No Why or why not?

    _____

    _____

13. Do you think that the Choctaw language was different before removal to Oklahoma?
    Yes No If yes, in what way?

    _____

    _____

14. In the future, do you think the Choctaw language should be taught to young childen?
    Yes No Why or why not?

    _____

    _____

STUDENT RESPONSES (N = 36)

1. What is your first language?
   - 27 Choctaw
   - 9 English
2. What is the dominant language in your home?
   - 29 Choctaw
   - 7 English
3. How well can you speak Choctaw?
   - 3 cannot
   - 8 some
   - 12 moderately
   - 13 fluently
4. How well can you write Choctaw?
   - 22 cannot
   - 13 some
   - 1 moderately
   - 0 fluently
5. How well can you read Choctaw?
   - 9 cannot
   - 24 some
   - 3 moderately
   - 0 fluently
6. If you do not speak Choctaw, how well do you understand the language?
   - 0 cannot
   - 6 some
   - 11 moderately
   - 12 fluently
   - 7 no response
7. Do you think bilingual courses should be offered at Choctaw Central High School?
   - 29 yes
   - 7 no

   Positive replies:

   - 8 "For students who want to learn the language but were never taught."
   - 5 "Because everybody should know about the Choctaw language--the past and present."

4 "To learn more languages."
2 "Because we should not lose our traditions/language."
1 "Because it would be fun learning a different language."
1 "To help the students."
1 "To learn more about early ancestors."
1 "Because half and half would be more helpful."
1 "To know more of the English meanings and more history."
1 "Maybe there are some students who don't understand it well enough in English."
1 "To give young Choctaws and non-Choctaws more understanding of Indians/Whitemen; also to read and write."
1 "To learn more words."
2 No explanation given.

Negative replies:

1 "Because most of the students should already know the Choctaw language."
1 "Because I hate going to bilingual class."
1 "I could hardly understand it."
1 "Because their parents can teach them."
1 "Not necessary."
2 No explanation given.

8. Would you take a class taught in Choctaw?
23 Yes
13 No

Positive replies:

7 "So I can learn more of the Choctaw language."
3 "To learn to read and write Choctaw/learn customs and traditions."
2 "To learn to read and write/speak."
1 "So we could speak the language properly; not all of us know it well."
1 "To learn to read, write, signal (hand), and sing."
1 "To learn words I don't know."
1 "To learn more than I know now."
1 "So I won't forget how to speak and read it."

1 "It would be interesting to learn more."
1 "To learn more of the language so it can be passed along to others."
1 "I might understand better if it is taught in Choctaw."
1 "If I knew the language well, I would."
1 "Because it would make me think about how our people started speaking Choctaw."
1 No explanation given.

Negative replies:

1 "I would hardly understand it."
1 "Because I might not learn anything in English or might mix my language up."
1 "I don't really need to know the language, because I can understand a lot of it."
1 "I can't understand what the words mean."
1 "I don't think I would understand most of the words the teacher is speaking."
1 "I don't think I would--a whole lot."
1 "Too much work."
1 "I would rather take English, because I understand English."
5 No explanation given.

9. Do you think classes should be taught in Choctaw?

17 Yes
18 No
1 Undecided

Positive replies:

2 "So the students could understand what they're talking about."
2 "Because some of the students don't really understand English."
1 "Because some of the students might not know what the name of an animal is or how anything else is pronounced."
1 "Because we are Choctaw and need to know more about the language."
1 "To teach the language."
1 "If the students want to learn more about the Choctaw language."

1 "If the course is in Choctaw."
1 "So the language can be passed on."
1 "If the course is Choctaw."
1 "Because some parents don't teach us anymore."
1 "If it is a Choctaw school, why shouldn't they?"
1 "Because some of the elders and some of the adults only speak Choctaw."
1 "For some people."
1 "They need to learn."
1 No explanation given.

Undecided:

"I don't know; for one, it would be easier to students that know Choctaw, but then would the book be written in English or Choctaw? Plus, the kids might get too 'use to' the course, and not learn enough proper English."

Negative replies:

4 "There might be a student who doesn't understand the Choctaw language."
1 "It is better to teach in English because that is what is mostly spoken 'nowadays.'"
1 "Because we have few Choctaw teachers."
1 "Because everyone is using English."
1 "So we would be able to speak better around people who don't know Choctaw."
1 "So everybody can learn to speak Choctaw and English."
1 "I don't think all classes should be taught in Choctaw, just some."
1 "Because we need to learn how to speak English as well."
1 "Even though Choctaw is our language, English needs to be taught more."
1 "Most everything is written in English."
1 "I prefer English classes."
1 "Because students who speak English and Choctaw might get mixed up."
1 "I don't know."

1 "Because it might affect the people."
1 No explanation given.

10. Is there an advantage to being bilingual?
28 Advantage
7 Disadvantage
1 No response

Positive replies:

2 "You can communicate with other people."
2 "Because we understand two languages and understand each other."
1 "Because they like it."
1 "Because some students do not speak the English language."
1 "Learning isn't hard when you try it; it's like trying to speak another language."
1 "You could talk to Choctaws and white folks or anybody else who wouldn't understand, and they would want to know what you said and what language you were speaking."
1 "Because you might want to know the language anyway."
1 "It's more easy to learn and understand."
1 "So you would be able to teach Choctaw and English to the ones who don't know."
1 "So we can have two languages to speak so people won't understand what we say, so we can discuss situations among ourselves."
1 "It helps you to talk to people and make them understand."
1 "They have more experiences."
1 "You can understand a language a lot of people can't."
1 "Because many people would want to be bilingual."
1 "Because you can translate for someone who doesn't understand. Plus, it would come in handy if another person couldn't speak English, only Choctaw."
1 "More Choctaws are now speaking in English."
1 "It helps to understand more in English."
9 No explanation given.

Negative replies:

1 "Because I don't know what they are saying sometimes."
1 "Because books are written in English."
1 "Because some people are prejudiced."
1 "I don't know."
1 "Because other Choctaw people want to learn more English."
2 No explanation given.
1 No response.

11. If you are bilingual, do you find the Choctaw language more precise than the English language?

Responses were omitted due to student confusion over the question.

12. If you are bilingual, do you feel the Choctaw language interferes with English language pronunciation?

9 Yes
23 No
4 No response

Positive replies:

1 "Because what you can say in English you can say in Choctaw, and sometimes you use the Choctaw word."
1 "Because all we learn is the English language rather than Choctaw."
1 "Because it happens lots of times."
6 No explanation given.

Negative replies:

1 "Both languages are spoken, so they do not interfere with each other."
1 "The Choctaw language is different from English."
1 "If I know English, which is a hard language, I think I could speak Choctaw."
1 "How can it interfere?"
1 "Because Choctaw words almost sound like the English."
1 "I think its equal, if we speak both languages."

1 "I don't speak Choctaw; I wouldn't know."
1 "Sometimes it's the English."
1 "Because I understand more Choctaw then English."
1 "Because if you know English already, you won't forget it."
1 "It is easier to relate with your friends, other than talking English."
12 No explanation given.
4 No response given.

13. Do you think that the Choctaw language was different before removal to Oklahoma?
14 Yes
19 No
3 No response

Positive replies:

1 "They would have pronounced the words differently."
1 "Different pronunciation or meanings."
1 "Different communities keep changing names and words."
1 "Because if the Choctaws and Choctaw language differ, it had to be different."
1 "I think there were more words in the Choctaw language."
1 "It changes over the years."
8 No explanation given.

Negative replies:

1 "Because they were Mississippi Choctaws before they went to Oklahoma."
1 "I think it is still the same."
17 No explanation given.
3 No response.

14. In the future, do you think the Choctaw language should be taught to young children?
32 Yes
4 No

Positive replies:

2 "It would keep the tradition going."

2 "To keep up the heritage."

1 "So they would know more in Choctaw than English. However, English is important, too, but their language should come first."

1 "So that the Choctaw people would not forget the Choctaw language."

1 "So they can keep up the Choctaw tradition of speaking the language."

1 "It will help them understand what it means."

1 "So they could learn it as well as English."

1 "Because they will need to know and understand their own culture."

1 "So that young children could talk 'straight' in their language."

1 "It could be useful when you need to interpret for other people."

1 "So they can go on with the Choctaw language."

1 "Because they are Choctaw."

1 "Because its part of our heritage."

1 "Young children need to know their language, so they won't forget when they get older."

1 "Because we do not want to lose the Choctaw language."

1 "To know the Choctaw language; to read and write."
"They would know more Choctaw words as they grew up."

1 "Just to keep our culture."

1 "To keep in good spirit--of their mother language."

1 "To keep the heritage in the family."

1 "So young children will learn how to talk the Choctaw language."

1 "Because they are Choctaw and should keep it up."

9 No explanation given.

Negative replies:

1 "When they are taught Choctaw, they will not understand English."

1 "When we go out into the world, people aren't going to speak Choctaw; they will speak English."

1 "Maybe they would cope with life better, speaking English."

1 "The school books are written in English."

Survey results indicate the importance the Choctaw students place on knowing their language and "perpetuating" their Choctaw heritage. This is reflected in the number of students who consider Choctaw their first language and the number of positive responses in regard to the Choctaw language being taught as a class. Opinions were equally divided in regard to the Choctaw language being used as a "vehicle" in teaching a course. The primary concern was that their mastery of the English language would be affected.

The Choctaw language is surviving and playing an important role in the lives of Choctaw students. Hopefully, each generation will strive to keep the Choctaw language, traditions, and culture alive.

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GRAMMAR

OF THE

CHOCTAW LANGUAGE,

BY THE

REV. CYRUS BYINGTON.

Edited from the original MSS. in the Library of the American Philosophical Society,

BY

D. G. BRINTON, M. D.,

Member of the American Philosophical Society; the Pennsylvania Historical Society; Corresponding Member of the American Ethnological Society, etc.

PHILADELPHIA:
McCALLA & STAVELY, PRINTERS, 237–9 DOCK STREET.
1870.

Title page of "one of the most valuable, original and instructive of any [work] ever written of an American language."--D.G. Brinton, Editor, Grammar of the Choctaw Language by the Rev. Cyrus Byington

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Thallis Lewis, Director, Bilingual/ESL (English as a Second Language) Program, Choctaw Department of Education, Pearl River, Mississippi / Photo, courtesy of Thallis Lewis

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Two become one while
Cherished customs are renewed
Through honor-bound vows

CHAPTER 5

CHOCTAW IMAGES, COURTSHIP, AND MARRIAGE

Loretta Willis

In 1818, when missionaries began their labors in the Choctaw Nation, the Choctaws were described as being "hospitable, grateful for favors, unobtrusive, neither forgetting or forgiving. They were fond of dress, of paint and plumes, of trinkets and jewelry," and they spent hours "adorning" themselves. Their favorite colors were red and blue. They wore ornaments of silver, which they obtained during "predatory excursions about the sources of the Arkansas and Ouachitta, and from the earliest times there were skilled artisans in metal among them." Testimonies by missionaries described the Choctaws as "strictly honest" and "scrupuously [sic] punctual." If an article was borrowed, it was returned "the very hour . . . promised." The Choctaws "recognized a Supreme Being or Great Spirit, who made and ruled all things. But they had not even a traditional knowledge of any other religion. They believed the air was peopled with good and evil spirits, the latter more numerous, and to their influence they attributed individual and national misfortunes."[1]

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1. J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), pp. 500-503.

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Choctaw men were "models of manly beauty, tall, well developed, active, graceful, with classic features and intellectual expression, grave, dignified, deliberate and always self-possessed." When not at war, the males "were usually hunting, not in parties, (unless they . . . [thought they may] . . . encounter enemies) but singly and alone . . . [the] only companion a small dog. They were dexterous with the bow and arrow, and became expert with the rifle."[2]

Choctaw women, "particularly the maidens, [were] small, delicate, beautifully formed, with sparkling eyes[,] and tresses that swept the ground, drooping their eyes before a warrior's glance, but gay, social, fascinating, their voices low and lute-like, and their laugh like the ripple of a brook over its pebbly bed."[3]

> They were the burden bearers, and bread providers of the tribe, and if ever woman's mission, with all its trials and grievances, has been faithfully and uncomplainingly performed, it has been by the Indian women of the South. Untaught, . . . with only instinctive tenderness, delicacy and sense of duty of their sex to guide them, they uniformly manifested the highest attributes of human nature. Chaste, modest, resigned, patient, industrious, honest, devoted to husband and children, and always faithful to their country. They brought up their girls like themselves; they taught their boys to be honest, truthful and brave.[4]

Rev. Israel Folsom, as quoted in Cushman, records that the Choctaws "were divided into various clans called Iksa, established and regulated upon principles of unity, fidelity and charity." The principles were "inviobly [sic] observed . . . at all times and under all circumstances and never . . . forgotten." In time of need, all . . . [one] had to do was to give the necessary intimation of his membership of one of those Iksas," and he would receive assistance. Marriage between persons of the same Iksa was "forbidden by the common law of the tribe."[5]

Swanton, quoted an "informant," Simpson Tubby, in regard to the "exogamic system."

> "If it was found that two people of the same iksa had married, they were separated even though they belonged to different towns. Sometimes a man pretended that he belonged to an iksa different from that of a woman whom he wished to marry, when in fact it was the same, and did marry her,

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[2]Ibid., pp. 502, 506.

[3]Ibid., p. 506.

[4]Ibid., p. 501.

[5]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, ed. Angie Debo (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), p. 306.

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but as soon as the truth was known they were separated."[6]

Marriage and courtship customs among the Choctaws in the past have been recorded by numerous historians and missionaries. Some accounts are similar; some different. Descriptions vary, covering simple, meaningful ceremonies to elaborate, symbolic ones.

As quoted in Swanton, an anonymous French authority recorded the following:

> When a youth wishes to marry, he goes to find the father and mother of the girl whom he desires. After having made his request he throws before the mother some strings of glass beads, and before the father a breechclout. If they take the presents it is a sign of their consent, and then the youth leads the girl away to his home without other ceremony. From this moment the mother can no longer appear before her son-in-law; if they are obliged to remain in the same room they make a little partition between them for fear lest they see each other. . . . They may abandon their wives whenever they wish, and take many of them at a time. I saw one who had three sisters. When they marry a second time they take the sister of the dead wife, if she had one, otherwise a woman of the family.[7]

According to Rev. Israel Folsom, as quoted by Cushman, when a young man decided on marriage during ancient times, "he tested his own standing" with the girl. He "slyly and unobserved," threw "a little stick or pebble at her." She, in turn, understood the "little messengers of love." If she approved, she returned the action; if not, she left the room. When there was approval, the groom returned in two or three days with presents for the parents. Then the marriage date was set; friends were invited; and a feast was planned. The prospective groom chased the prospective bride towards a pole set at a pre-designated point. She would let him catch her before the pole was reached; but if she had changed her mind, which "seldom happened," she would not let him catch her. After catching the willing party, the groom led her back to where lady friends were waiting to place her on a "blanket spread upon the ground." She was surrounded by a circle of women, who bestowed gifts on her head. The presents, however, did not go to the bride, but were claimed by the women in the circle who grabbed for them as they fell upon the bride's head. After all the presents had been claimed, the two "were pronounced one--man and wife; then the feast was served, after which all returned to their respective homes with merry and happy hearts."[8]

[6]John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931), p. 81.

[7]*Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, vol. 5, no. 2, quoted in John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931), p. 127.

[8]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, pp. 309-311.

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Claiborne, in his notes from his "Journal as United States Senator," records that when a young warrior was in love, he applied to the maternal uncle, not to the father or mother. A price was agreed upon and payment was made to the uncle. The groom and his relatives "dressed in their best," would go to an "appointed place," where they lingered until noon, when the bride emerged from her parents' lodge. Surrounded by her friends, she watched for an opportunity and then fled into the woods, her friends covering her "retreat." The female relatives of the groom pursued her. If she was anxious for the match, it was easy to overtake her; if not, she ran until she was exhausted. Sometimes she escaped and wandered "to a remote village where she . . . [was] adopted" and could not be reclaimed. The bride who was "overtaken," was returned to the groom's friends where she received gifts tossed on her lap. Female relatives tied "a ribbon or some beads in the hair," and "provisions brought by friends . . . [were] divided among the company to be taken to their respective homes." The bride was then "conducted to a lodge adjoining her parents," where "late at night her lover . . . found his way to her arms." The next morning, the couple disappeared, and "the fawn of the woods . . . [had to] be sought in the camp of her husband."[9]

"Very litle capital" was required to go into housekeeping. Land was free, and cabins could easily be built at the side of some spring. A young couple found it sufficient when they had a small iron kettle for cooking hominy and venison and a wooden bowl for serving the food when it was cooked. No tables were needed, because seating was on the ground.[10]

"If a chief wished to marry, he had to send his principal men to select a young and beautiful girl of a noble family. The girl who was selected was brought before the chief. Then the wedding took place with great pomp and ceremony."[11]

Pushmataha, one of the most well-known of the Choctaw chiefs, had two wives.

> Pushmataha, in unison with the ancient custom of the Choctaws, had two wives. Being asked if he did not consider it wrong for a man to have more than one living wife, he replied: "Certainly not. Should not every woman be allowed the privilege of having a husband as well as a man a wife? and [sic] how can every one have a husband when there are more women

[9] J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, pp. 516-517.

[10] Ibid., p. 501.

[11] Albert J. Pickett, *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, from the Earliest Period*, quoted in Orval H. Deweese, "The Mississippi Choctaws" (unpublished manuscript, Mississippi State University), p. 11.

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than men? Our Great Father had the Choctaws counted last year, and it was ascertained that there were more women than men, and if a man was allowed but one wife many of our women would have no husbands. Surely, the women should have equal chances with the men in that particular."[12]

According to an 1899 publication, a Choctaw was "not slow in resenting any insult offered to the female portion of his family." In one incident, when a white soldier "grossly insulted," Pushmataha's wife, the chief "knocked him down with the hilt of his sword, instead of plunging it through his body, as he should have done." Had the offender been the commanding General, he would have, in the words of Pushmataha, received the point of the sword, not the hilt. In his answer to the General's inquiry, Pushmataha said: "He insulted my wife, and I knocked the insolent dog down; but had you General, insulted her as that common soldier did, I would have used the point upon you instead of the hilt, in resenting an insult offered to my wife." The common soldier who insulted Pushmataha's wife was, as Cushman evaluated it, "too contemptible a creature for the point of his sword."[13]

Polygamy was not "universal" among the Choctaws, but it was "tolerated." The wives lived in separate cabins, "generally ten or more miles apart." If two wives were sisters, they could live in the same house, but sometimes they "lived in the same yard, but in different houses."[14]

Choctaws of the same clan could not intermarry. This was regarded "with the same horror as the white man . . . [marrying] his own sister." Choctaw clans were

> all perpetuated in the female line. When a man married, he was adopted into the family of the wife, and her brothers had more authority over her children than her husband; therefore, when a [man] . . . wished to marry a girl, he consulted her uncles, and if they consented to the marriage, the father and mother approved. [15]

In regard to the "attitude of the Choctaw toward sexual offenses," fornication was considered a "natural accident" and therefore was not a serious offense, but adultery was a different matter. If a woman was adulterous, she became an outcast and was destined to spend her remaining days separated from the rest of the group. In addition, she

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[12]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 266.

[13]Ibid., pp. 266-267.

[14]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, p. 520.

[15]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 87.

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was to appear at a public place where she was "carnally known" by whomever it pleased.[16]

Aboha Kullo Humma (Red Fort), chief of the Okla Hunnali, wrote a letter October 18, 1822, to the Prudential Committee, listing some laws he had established. (Red Fort's letter was forwarded with Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury's letter to the committee. Kingsbury was soliciting more teachers for teaching in Red Fort's district.) The following was included in the laws: "The Choctaws have, sometimes, run off with each other's wives. We have now made a law, that those who do so, shall be whipped thirty-nine lashes; and if a woman runs away from her husband with another man, she is also to be whipped in the same manner."[17]

In regard to divorce, Claiborne recorded the following: "The marriage endures only during the affection or inclination of the parties, and either may dissolve it at pleasure. This, of course, very often occurs, in which case the children follow the mother; the father has no control over them whatever."[18]

Deweese, citing Foreman, states that "divorce was considered to have taken place when a difficulty arose between the husband and wife and they no longer . . . [ate] from the same bowl." The house was "returned to its original owner, whether it was the husband or wife." If the couple lived with relatives and it was the wife's relatives, she could "drive" her husband away. If they lived with the husband's relatives, he could do the same.[19]

> The uncle of the wife also had the authority to grant divorce. He could chastise his niece if she did not treat her husband decently. Likewise, if the husband did not conduct himself properly, the uncle could take the wife away. The children were allowed to stay with the mother after a divorce. There could be no reunion after the divorce unless the difficulties could be settled by the husband and wife or by the uncle. Then another marriage ceremony took place after the husband repurchased his wife.[20]

Adolph Jimmie, of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, granted the following interview, thus contributing a current memoir:

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[16]Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, vol. 1, quoted in John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931), pp. 110-111.

[17]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, pp. 87-88.

[18]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, p. 517.

[19]Grant Foreman, *Advancing the Frontier*, cited by Orval H. Deweese, "The Mississippi Choctaws" (unpublished manuscript, Mississippi State University, 1957, p. 12.

[20]Ibid.

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1. Was a Choctaw man permitted to court the woman of his choice?

   No.

2. If a Choctaw man was interested in marriage, to whom did he go with his intentions?

   He would go to his aunt, who would go to the girl's aunt with his intentions. If the outlook was positive, then the girl's parents were approached for permission.

3. Could the girl refuse a proposal, if her parents approved of the union?

   Not initially; however, she had the option to physically run away during the ceremony.

4. Was the couple allowed to spend any time alone together before their "engagement"?

   No.

   After the "engagement"?

   No.

5. Describe any wedding preparations you remember or may have heard about.

   The man was represented by his aunt, who made the request for the girl through her aunt. The two reached an agreement as to the probable marriage, and the girl's aunt and relatives arranged the marriage. The festivities were taken care of by the girl's family, and this included the ceremony and the eating. The groom provided the food, usually predetermined by the girl's family. On the selected day, the families got together and had the wedding ceremony and feast.

6. Who performed the wedding ceremony?

   An elder in the community or a designated individual of the family.

7. Describe the kind of ceremony that took place.

   The bride and groom were seated together in a designated place and the family and friends provided gifts for the ceremony. The gifts belonged to the girl's family, as they were brought to them. This continued until the girl's parents were satisfied with the gifts of the groom's family as a show of worthiness.

8. What kind of wedding clothing did the bride and groom wear?

   Traditional Choctaw clothing, as it is referred to today.

9. Was any food served following the wedding? If so, was the food traditional in kind or was just any kind served?

   Yes, any kind of food provided by the groom's family.

10. Did any kind of celebration take place following the wedding, such as dancing, games, etc.?

    Yes, any festivities that were at the pleasure of the two families.

11. Who provided the living quarters for the new couple?

    The girl's family.

12. Could a man have more than one wife?

    Polygamy was practiced until the infiltration of today's laws and the financial necessity!

13. Could a woman have more than one husband?

    No.

14. If polygamy was allowed, which was the most popular, polygamy or monogamy?

    Polygamy, until laws and finances later determined monogamy.

15. Was a divorce possible in the past? If so, under what conditions?

    Yes, but rarely. The man determined the divorce.

16. If divorce was possible, could either the man or the woman make the declaration of intent?

    The man determined the intent and conditions.

17. What constituted divorce?

    See answer 16.

18. What was the punishment for adultery?

    In the case of the woman, she was publicly humiliated or offered to other men in the community or village, and the marriage was dissolved at that point.

19. Did adultery "laws" hold true for the man as well as for the woman?

    I am not aware of a man's punishment for adultery.

20. Do you think young Choctaw couples should hold on to wedding customs of the past? Why or why not?

Yes. With recent laws enacted by the tribe recognizing the tribal wedding as true matrimonial rites and not necessarily having to adopt state laws governing marriage, marriages today may be held in the traditional Choctaw way.[21]

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Choctaw courtship and marriage customs have undergone changes over the years, as in other societies. However, many of the traditions are still evident at "traditional" Choctaw weddings today.

[21]Interview with Adolph Jimmie, Attendance Technician, Choctaw Central High School, Pearl River, Mississippi, 1 February 1985.

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Choctaws performing duck dance / David I. Bushnell, Jr., 1909; Reprinted by permission of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives

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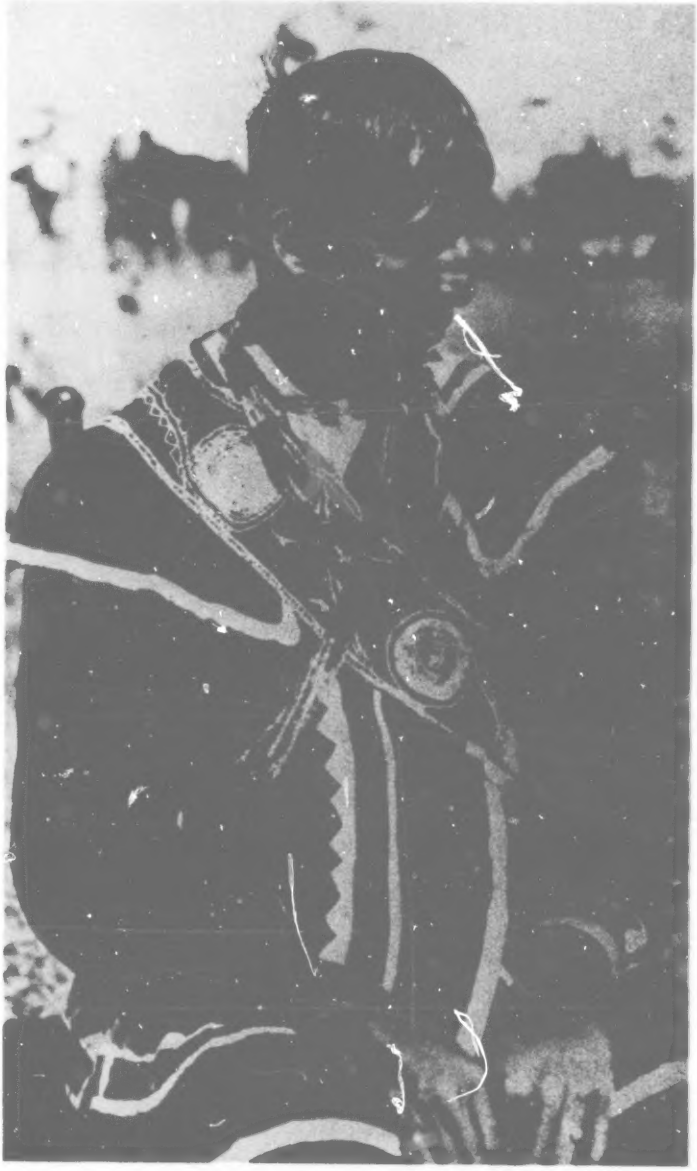

Close-up of Choctaw, Emil John / Photo by David I. Bushnell, Jr., 1909; Reprinted by permission of Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives

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Choctaw couple, in traditional attire, in a contemporary Choctaw wedding / Photo, courtesy of Bill Brescia

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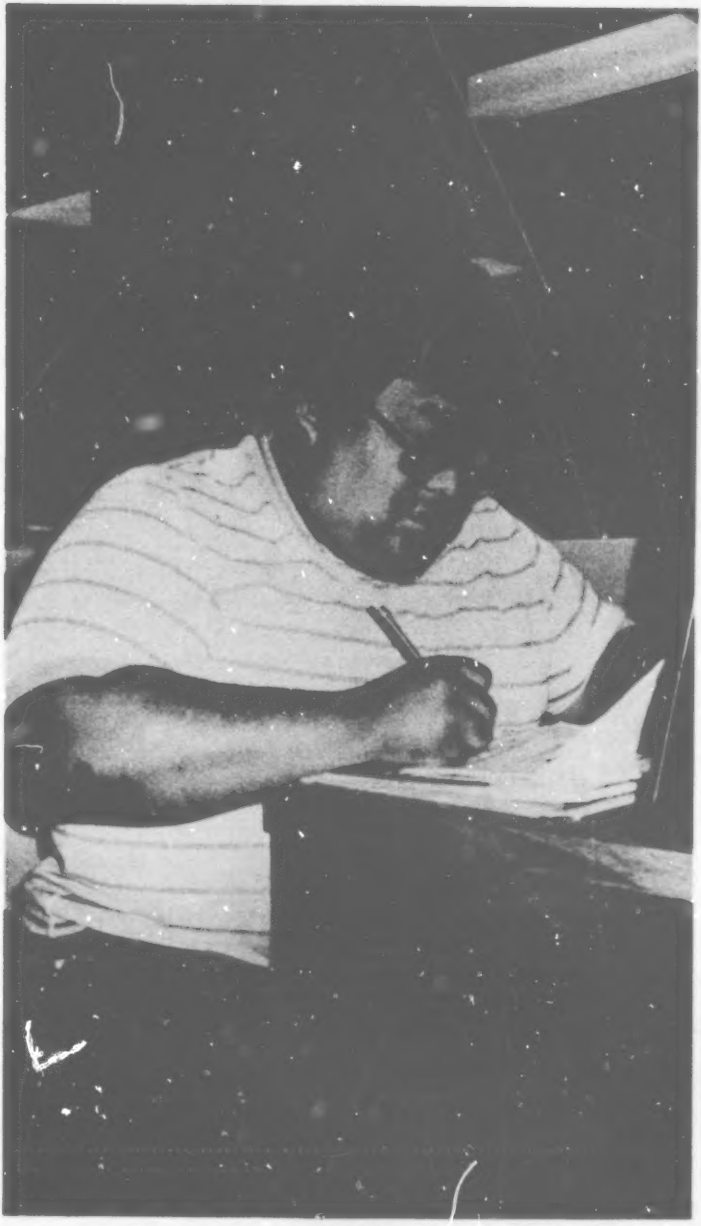
Wedded couple approaching buffet table / Photo, courtesy of Bill Brescia



Adolph Jimmie, Attendance Technician, Choctaw Central High School, Pearl River Community / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Tributes forged in stone
Allow us to remember
Heartbeats from time past

CHAPTER 6

PUSHMATAHA REMEMBERED

Diane Isaac

Many events depicting Pushmataha's life are recorded in history, for he was an active, well-respected warrior chief, skilled as a speaker, statesman, and diplomat. He was born in 1764 on the east bank of the Noxubee River, near the present-day town of Macon, located in east-central Mississippi.[1]

As a warrior, he led several war parties against the Creeks, whom he resented because they had reportedly killed his parents. He carried this resentment with him until he died. Until the capture of Pensacola, he held the position of colonel, with special honor, during the Creek War. On January 27, 1815, he was discharged as a Brigadier General from the American forces.[2]

Pushmataha was not one to turn away from a conflict; in fact, he reportedly traveled great distances to fight. During the late 1700's, the Osage, residing in the Red River country west of the Choctaw Nation, occasionally raided the canebrakes of the Choctaws. In response, Pushmataha took a group of warriors to Osage country and engaged the Osage in a fight. He returned victorious, with the "white-plumed headdress of the Osage chief" that he had personally taken.[3]

On another occasion, a band of Muscogees entered the Choctaw Nation and raided several settlements, during which time Pushmataha's home was burned. Again, gathering a group of warriors,

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[1]Bob Ferguson, "Sketch of Pushmataha," *Choctaw Indian Fair Program*, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, July 1978.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Lee F. Harkins, "In Defense of Pushmataha," *Antlers American*, Antlers, Oklahoma, 30 September 1937.

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Pushmataha traveled to the Muscogee Nation and "repaid them tenfold for the destruction of his home."[4] In 1813, when Pushmataha heard of the Creek massacre of five hundred settlers at Fort Mims, Alabama, he, along with his warriors, offered assistance to the American forces. In the Battle of New Orleans, he and five hundred warriors assisted Andrew Jackson; and with seven hundred warriors, he met the Creeks in the Battle of Horse Shoe Bend.[5]

Through his eloquence, Pushmataha was able to captivate and persuade. Tecumseh and Pushmataha, both powerful, persuasive speakers, met in 1811 to debate. The topic was support of the British, or the Americans, in the conflict that became known as the War of 1812. The audience consisted of the Chickasaws and Choctaws. In this eloquent, but heated debate, Pushmataha persuaded the two tribes to support the Americans.[6]

In plans for the Treaty of Washington City, 1825, the United States wanted to reclaim a portion of the land--five million acres--awarded the Choctaws in the Treaty of Doak's Stand, 1820. Choctaw land cession amounted to over five million acres of their Mississippi homeland in exchange for thirteen million acres west of the Mississippi River. This land was located in what is presently southern Oklahoma and western Arkansas.[7] Stipulations in the Treaty of Washington City meant that the Choctaws would cede the five million Arkansas acres to the United States, leaving the Choctaws only land in Oklahoma.[8] During the treaty negotiations, the following conversation took place between Colonel McKee and Pushmataha:

> "Chief, I've known you a great many years. I've never until today heard you deviate a hair's breadth from the truth."
>
> Pushmataha asked, "What do you mean?"
>
> The Colonel replied, "You know I was present at the Treaty of Doak's Stand and heard you describe this country west of the Mississippi, and particularly that territory between the Canadian fork of the Arkansas and Red rivers, as a prairie country so barren of wood and scarce of water, so

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[4]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, ed. Angie Debo (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), p. 238.

[5]Lee F. Harkins, "In Defense of Pushmataha."

[6]H.B. Cushman, *The History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, p. 262.

[7]Charles J. Kappler, comp., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1904), pp. 191-195.

[8]Charles C. Royce, comp., *Indian Land Cessions in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1900; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1971), plate 13.

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unfit for settlement that you frequently had to make fire of dry buffalo dung; and today you describe that portion of that tract which the government wants you to surrender . . . as being fertile, well wooded and watered, and desirable for settlement."

The chief's face lighted up into a smile and he replied, "I was buying then, and I am selling now, which as you know, Colonel, makes a difference. I learned that from you white people."[9]

In 1824, when Pushmataha was in Washington, D.C. to negotiate the Treaty of Washington City, the United States "was celebrating the return of General Lafayette to this country." As part of the welcoming festivities, it was decided to have the Choctaw delegation meet Lafayette. Mushulatubbee spoke first; then Pushmataha, "with all dignity and sincerity, told General Lafayette how he felt about Lafayette's place in American history." The last portion of his speech follows: ". . . We had heard of these things even in our remote land, and our hearts were filled with desire and anxiety to see you. We have come. We have taken you by the hand and are satisfied. It is the first and last time. We shall meet no more. We part on earth forever. That is all I have to say."[10]

Pushmataha was active in diplomatic activities of the Choctaw Nation. His signature appears on the Treaty of Mount Dexter, November 16, 1805; the Treaty of the Choctaw Trading House, October 24, 1816; and the Treaty of Doak's Stand, October 8, 1820. He died before the Treaty of Washington City, January 20, 1825 and the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, September 27, 1830 were signed.[11]

On September 23, 1824, a ten-member Choctaw delegation, including the three chiefs of the Choctaw Nation, Pushmataha, Apuckshunnubbee, and Mushulatubbee, left the Nation for Washington, D.C.[12] The chiefs hoped to "settle" the Arkansas land problem; however, that was not to be. Only Mushulatubbee returned home alive. (Apuckshunnubbee died enroute to Washington;[13] and Pushmataha died in Washington on Christmas Eve, 1824.) When the delegation "reached Washington the last week of October,

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[9]Anna Lewis, *Chief Pushmataha, American Patriot* (New York: Exposition Press, 1959), pp. 175-176.

[10]Ibid., p. 179.

[11]Charles J. Kappler, comp., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Vol. 2, pp. 87-319; Charles C. Royce, comp., *Indian Land Cessions in the United States*, pp. 672-727.

[12]Herman J. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1974), p. 127.

[13]Ibid.

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McKenney[14] lodged them at Joshua Tennison's hotel on the south side of Pennsylvania Ave. . . ., a short, refreshing walk from the War Department."[15] From that time until January 22, 1825, treaty negotiations, through a series of letters and discussions, were conducted between Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun and the Choctaw delegation.[16]

In December, Pushmataha, in an attempt to acquire Choctaw claims from the United States said:

> Father, I have been here many days, but I have not talked with you and have been sick. . . . When in my country, I often looked toward this Council House and desired to see it; I have come, but I am troubled and would tell my sorrows for I feel as a little child reclining in the bend of its father's arm. . . . I would now recline in the bend of your arm, and trustingly look in your face; therefore, hear my words. . . . None of my ancestors nor my present nation, ever fought against the United States. As a nation of peoples, we have always been friendly, and ever listened to the talks of the American people. We have held the hands of the United States so long that our nails are long as birds' claws and there is no danger of their slipping out.[17]

Fate did not allow Pushmataha time enough to see the treaty negotiations completed. He "died in Washington on December 24, 1824, before the treaty was signed, of croup that he contracted during the negotiations."[18] Following is an excerpt from the Washington Gazette:

> He fell a victim of the distressing malady of croup and at the time of his death was 58 years of age. [60 years is engraved on the monument] He bore his affliction with great firmness, was conscious of his approaching end, and predicted with unusual sagacity the hour at which he should die. This prediction was literally fulfilled.
>
> We had a personal opportunity of witnessing the last moments of this chief and are satisfied that death had few or no terrors for him. . . .[19]

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[14] "Thomas Loraine McKenney is one of the most significant yet least known figures in the history of the American Indian. For almost fourteen years, between 1816 and 1830, he administered the nations' Indian Affairs, first as superintendent of Indian trade and then as head of the Office of Indian Affairs."
Herman J. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830*, preface page xi.

[15] Ibid., p. 127.

[16] *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States*. 38 volumes. Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1832-1861. Class 3: *Indian Affairs*, 2 volumes (Washington, 1832-1834), pp. 247-255.

[17] Anna Lewis, *Chief Pushmataha, American Patriot*, pp. 182-183.

[18] Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 82.

[19] *Washington Gazette*, 24 December 1824, cited by Anna Lewis, *Chief Pushmataha, American Patriot*, p. 187.

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Pushmataha, "certain of his approaching death . . . called for his weapons and trophies of war and asked that 'the big guns be fired over me.'"[20] A military funeral honoring Pushmataha was held in Washington. The cortege consisted of two thousand congressmen, citizens, and government officials.

"The following was the order for the procession:

1. The United States Marine Band
2. The Reverend Mr. Howley and Colonel McKinney of the Indian Department
3. The hearse containing the corpse
4. Pallbearers
5. One of the chiefs of the Nation, Mosholatubbee
6. Captain Dyers' company of riflemen of the First Legion of Militia of the District of Columbia
7. Delegation of the Choctaw Nation and their interpreter Major Pitchlynn
8. Officers of the Government and citizens of Washington"[21]

"The minute guns that thundered on Capitol Hill were echoed by three crisp musket volleys at the graveside as America paid tribute to a fallen warrior."[22] Andrew Jackson referred to Pushmataha as "the greatest and bravest Indian I ever knew. He was wise in counsel, eloquent in an extraordinary degree, and on all occasions and under all circumstances the white man's friend."[23]

"The remains of the distinguished chief of the Choctaw Nation were interred on Christmas Day with the honors of war corresponding to the rank of Major General, and suitable to the character of the deceased."[24] "President John Quincy Adams personally paid for the digging of Pushmataha's grave, and a medal was sent by him to [Pushmataha's] . . . son. . . ."[25] Burial was in the Congressional Cemetery.

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[20]Herman J. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830*, p. 131.

[21]*Washington Gazette*, 25 December 1824, cited by Anna Lewis, *Chief Pushmataha, American Patriot*, p. 188.

[22]Herman J. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830*, p. 131.

[23]Dunbar Rowland, *History of Mississippi, The Heart of the South* (Chicago: 1925), p. 551, cited by Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 83.

[24]*Washington Gazette*, 25 December 1824, cited by Anna Lewis, *Chief Pushmataha, American Patriot*, p. 188.

[25]Lee F. Hopkins, "In Defense of Pushmataha."

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A four-sided, sandstone marker was erected at Pushmataha's gravesite. The following words were inscribed on the marker:

PUSH-MA-TA-HA
A
CHOCTAW CHIEF
LIES HERE,
THIS MONUMENT TO HIS
MEMORY IS ERECTED BY HIS
BROTHER CHIEFS WHO WERE
ASSOCIATED WITH HIM
IN A
DELEGATION
FROM THEIR NATION,
IN THE YEAR 1824, TO THE
GENERAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
UNITED STATES

PUSH-MA-TA-HA WAS A
WARRIOR OF GREAT DISTINCTION
HE WAS WISE IN COUNCIL
ELOQUENT IN AN EXTRAORDINARY
DEGREE, AND ON ALL OCCASIONS
AND UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES
THE WHITE MAN'S FRIEND

HE DIED IN WASHINGTON,
ON THE 24TH OF DECEMBER,
1824, OF THE CROUP, IN THE
60TH YEAR OF HIS AGE
AMONG HIS LAST WORDS
WERE THE FOLLOWING:
"WHEN I AM GONE, LET THE
BIG GUNS BE FIRED
OVER ME."[26]

---

[26] "Push-Ma-Ta-Ha Comes Home," *Choctaw Community News*, 30 August 1977.

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In 1976, Fisher Rhymes, a student of Choctaw history from Macon, Mississippi, visited Pushmataha's grave, and noticed that the marker had begun to show signs of weathering and deterioration.[27] He contacted Audrey Jones, Director of the Congressional Cemetery, and she recommended he contact James Blackmon, of Wilson and King, Inc., who was interested in the restoration of the cemetery. After examining the monument, he said that it could be repaired for about two hundred dollars, but that this would only be temporary "because the sandstone was flaking off in sheets." Mr. Blackmon said that even if it were repaired and encased in acrylic, "it would continue to absorb moisture, freeze and thaw, and eventually deteriorate" within fifty years. He submitted an estimate of one thousand dollars to replace the pedestal in Tennessee marble. In March 1976, Rhymes met with Calvin Isaac (Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians), David Gardner (Chief of the Oklahoma Choctaws), Jon Hinson, and John Parker to form a committee to raise funds for replacing the stone, and for moving the original stone to the Choctaw Reservation. Senator John Stennis also supported the cause.[28]

After the funds were raised, a replica of the original tombstone was made from Tennessee marble. The original sandstone marker was sent to the Pearl River community of the Choctaw Reservation, Mississippi in July, 1977.

In 1978, the theme for the twenty-ninth annual Choctaw Indian Fair was "The Return of the Spirit of Pushmataha." During a ceremony befitting the noble chief, the marker was officially received and "welcomed" to his Choctaw ancestral home.

Today, the monument stands in the Museum of the Southern Indian on the Choctaw Reservation, as a tribute to this multi-talented man with the courageous heart--a heart that transcended boundaries of race, time, and attitudes. The essence of his words, deeds, and accomplishments must still linger in the Choctaw's piney woods, reaching out to those who will listen.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Fisher A. Rhymes to Charlie W. Jones, Memo, 7 May 1976.

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Pushmataha, noted Choctaw chief and warrior / Copied from C.B. King's original oil painting / Photo, courtesy of Museum of the Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation / Photo by Claude Allen

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Bob Ferguson, Curator, Museum of the Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation / Photo by Bill Brescia

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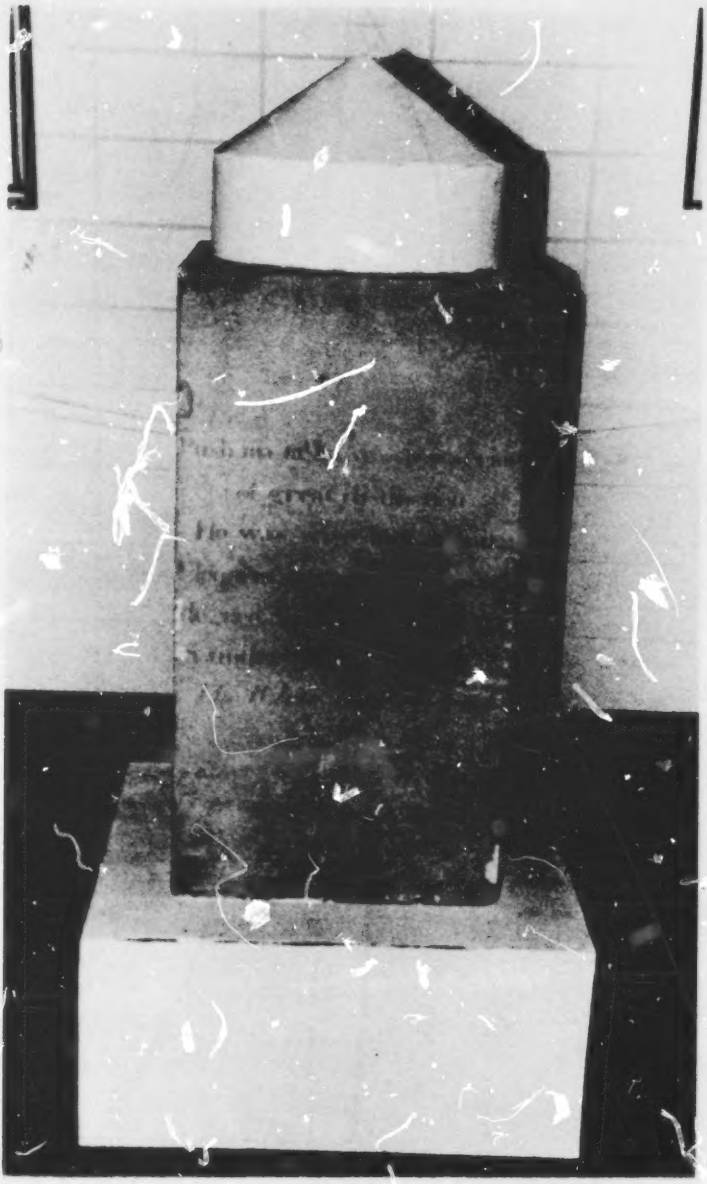
Museum of the Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation, Pearl River Community / Photo by Bill Brescia



Pushmataha's original grave marker, now located in Museum of the Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation / Photo by Claudia Alle

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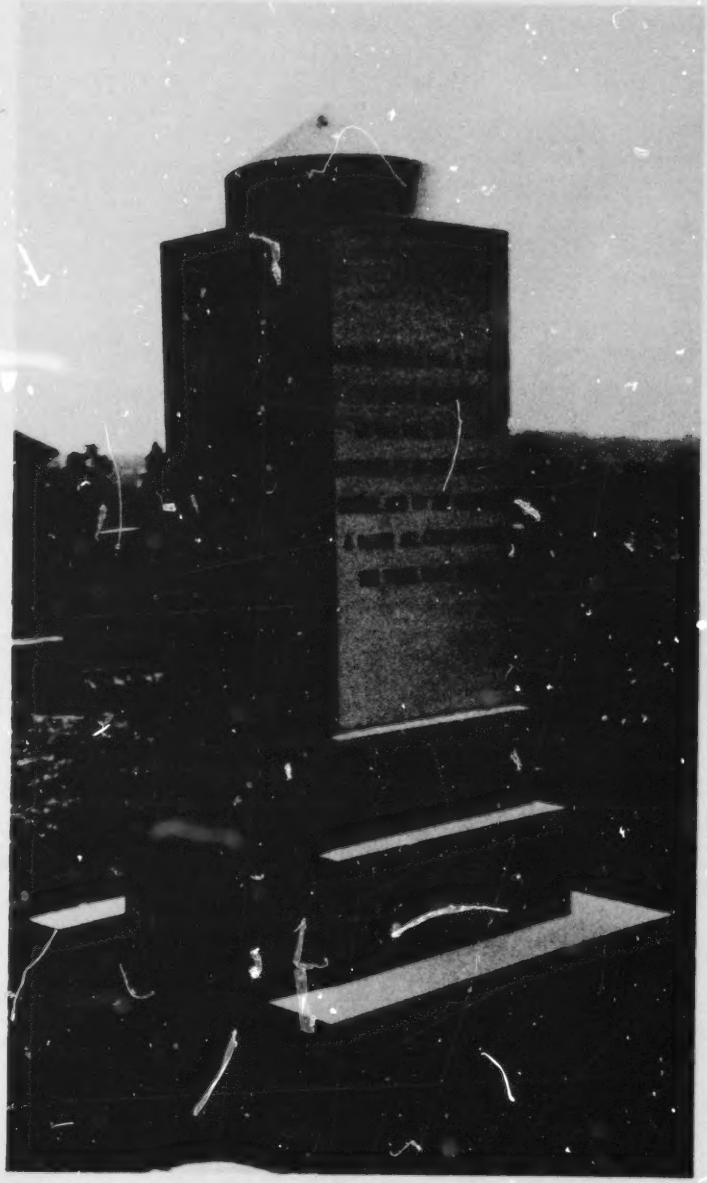

Replacement monument, located at Pushmataha's grave, Congressional Cemetery, Washington, D.C. / Photo by Sharon Lewis, Congressional Cemetery staff

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The Choctaw spirit
Transcending distance, time, change
Touches the pure heart

CHAPTER 7

CHOCTAW PERCEPTIONS: LEGENDS AND SUPERSTITIONS

Roy Ketcher

Many years ago when the Choctaw Indians occupied the land which is now Mississippi, they, like other Indians of America, had a strong belief in the supernatural. Legends about witches, were-animals, the dead, and other phenomena abounded. One of the most important in Choctaw oral tradition was the Bohpoli, or little people. Halbert described the little people as he heard it from the Choctaw people long ago:

> The Choctaws in Mississippi say that there is a little man, about two feet high, that dwells in the thick woods and is solitary in his habits. This little sprite or hobgoblin is called by the Choctaws Bohpoli, or Kowi anukasha, both names being used indifferently or synonymous. . . . Bohpoli is represented as being somewhat sportive and mischievious but not malicious in nature. The Choctaws say that he often playfully throws sticks and stones at people. Every mysterious noise heard in the woods, whether by day or night, they ascribe to Bohpoli. He takes special pleasure, they say in striking the pine trees. . . . Bohpoli . . . is never seen by the common Choctaws. The Choctaw prophets and doctors, however, claim the power of seeing him and holding communication with him. The Indian doctors say that Bohpoli assists them in the manufacture of their medicines. Most Choctaws say or think that there is but one Bohpoli. In the opinion of others there may be more than one.[1]

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[1]Henry S. Halbert, "Indian Schools," *Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Education to the State Legislature, for the Scholastic Years 1895-96 and 1896-97*, p. 157, cited by Kendall Blanchard, *The Mississippi Choctaws at Play: The Serious Side of Leisure* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 145.

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Some believe that the Bohpoli would take small children deep into the woods to teach them the art of herb doctors and witch doctors. During the 1960's, a child from the Carthage, Mississippi area was said to have disappeared for a time; and when he was found, told of little men luring him deep into the forest to play. They used their magic to make the child invisible during the time the search parties looked for him. He was allowed to be found because he would not stop crying. His crying was proof to the Bohpoli that he was not one who should become a herb doctor or a witch doctor.[2]

Another creature spoken of by the Choctaws was something like the legendary bigfoot, known throughout America. Even in recent years some people have claimed to have seen the monster. At night this creature prowled around and drank water at a certain place. If this creature harmed someone even slightly, the person would eventually die because not even the strongest Choctaw medicine could match the power of the creature. He is called Na Losa Chitto.

Following is one tale of the Na Losa Chitto, supposedly occurring around 1920: Close to a small road leading from Conehatta to Lake was a swamp in the middle where strange things were said to have happened. One night a man was riding through the area with his wagon and mules. He was whistling to himself, trying not to think of the stories associated with that place, when he heard a sound coming from the darkness behind him. He turned and saw something that made his heart skip some beats. He saw the big, black, hairy monster called Na Losa Chitto running after him and catching up easily. The man coaxed his mules to pick up speed while trying not to show that he was terrified. When he looked behind again, he saw that the monster had reached the wagon and was climbing aboard. Seeing this, the man became so frightened that he jumped from the wagon onto one of his mules. Taking another look back, he saw that the monster was sitting in the same place that he had been sitting a moment ago. The creature was holding the reins and it appeared that he was trying to take control of the wagon. The man knew that one of his mules became easily frightened so he covered the mule's eyes with his hands. Finally, they were leaving the swamp and entering a populated area, and as they did, the man looked back again and the creature was gone.[3]

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[2]Interview with Terry Ben, Choctaw Tribal Member, Choctaw History Teacher, Choctaw Central High School, Pearl River, Mississippi, November 1984.

[3]Ibid.

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Certain birds are topics of many Choctaw legends. Simpson Tubby said

> . . . when the horned owl . . . screeched it meant a sudden death, such as a murder. If the screech owl . . . was heard, it was a sign that a child under seven . . . was going to die. If a common owl . . . alighted on a barn or on trees near the house and hooted it forboded death among the near relatives.

The sapsucker was considered the "news bird," bringing both bad and good news. "Hasty" news would arrive by noon if he landed in a nearby tree in the early morning; and "if he does this late at night, the news will come before morning." Chickens were believed to be harbingers of "friendly warning of danger."[4]

In stories collected by Bushnell, beings were described such as the Kashehotopalo, who were both men and deer, and who enjoyed frightening the Choctaws while they hunted. "Okwa Naholo, or 'white people of the water,'" were creatures with skin similar to fish, who would capture Choctaws who went into the water and convert them into replicas of themselves. Hoklonote'she was a spirit who could change into any form desired and who could read minds. "Nalusa Falaya, or 'the Long Black Being,'" looked like a man, but had "small eyes and long, pointed ears," and sometimes scared, or even harmed, hunters. Nahullo, meaning sacred or supernatural, were giants who lived in parts of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.[5]

The early Choctaws had many beliefs about the dead. One such belief follows: When a Choctaw dies, the spirit "has a great distance to travel . . . towards the West." Near the end of the journey, the spirit has to cross a stream. (This stream may be something like the River Styx from Greek mythology, which was a river of the underworld over which shades of the dead were ferried on their way to Hades.) Over the stream there is a long slippery log with no bark. To reach the land of happiness on the other side, the dead must walk across this log. On the other side of the stream are six men who throw stones at anyone who tries to walk across. Those who have lived a pure and good life make it all the way across and live in the land of happiness forever, which is described as "the good hunting grounds . . . where the trees are always green, . . . the sky has no clouds, . . . [with] continual fine and cooling breezes . . . [with] one continual scene of feasting, dancing and rejoicing--where there is no pain or trouble, and people never grow old. . . ."

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[4] John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931), p. 199.

[5] David I. Bushnell, Jr., "Myths of Louisiana Choctaws," *American Anthropology*, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, pp. 526-535, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, pp. 198-199.

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But the wicked, liars, and murderers "see the stones coming" and try to dodge them, then slipping from the log, they

> go down thousands of feet to the water, which is dashing over the rocks, and is stinking with dead fish, and animals, where they are carried around and brought continuously back to the same place in whirlpools--where the trees are all dead, and the waters are full of toads and lizards, and snakes--where . . . [they] are always hungry . . . and always sick . . . where the sun never shines, and where the wicked are continually climbing up by thousands on the sides of a high rock from which they can overlook the beautiful country of the good hunting-grounds, the place of the happy, but never can reach it.[6]

Prior to the Removal, it was believed that the shilup, the inside shadow, lived after the body died; but unlike the belief of Christians about judgement after death, nothing concerning one's conduct while living mattered. The shilup remained at its burial site for a while, then it left; no one knew what happened to the shilup after that. The shilombish, the outside shadow, would remain to wander over the land near the gravesite. It could change into different kinds of animals, moaning and groaning at night, which would frighten others into finding another place to live.

Also, the Choctaws of long ago were superstitious about seeing or dreaming about ghosts, because a ghost to them was a forerunner of death. When a person dreamed of a ghost, the person would be in torment. If a sick person saw one, he would lose all hope of living. His doctor would cease his job of curing the person because he knew there was no need to try. The only cure for these nightmares was to scare the demon away by the use of magic.[7]

One thing that the Choctaws of long ago, and even some now will not do, is say the name of a person who has died.[8] During treaty negotiations, families would be arranged in line by age with a vacancy in the line to tell of deceased family members.[9]

Gus Comby, a Choctaw elder, was interviewed on November 26, 1984. Following are stories he told about witches:

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[6]George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*, 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973), 2:127-128.

[7]Alfred Wright, *The Missionary Herald*, Boston, 1828, pp. 182-183, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, pp. 215-217.

[8]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, 1899, p. 246, cited by John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*, pp. 120-121.

[9]J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), p. 520.

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"One time a long time ago, I heard that a turkey came into the yard of some people, and the men shot the turkey. But when they looked the turkey was gone, and just some blood was left. They couldn't find anything but blood, so they trailed the blood to a spring or a well and found a woman washing herself. There was blood there and they followed her to her house where she lived with another woman. Finally, they found her body in the woods where she had died. She had died of a gunshot wound. Many hundreds of years ago, Choctaws could turn into animals. They could put a curse on one another. That woman who turned into a turkey was a witch and didn't like the people whose yard she had entered.

"A witch could be a man or a woman, who were witches from the time they were babies. You could tell witches because they stayed by themselves and were liked by wild animals. They could send a curse by an animal. Some herb doctors could 'beat' the witches; their powers sometimes stronger than the witches. When Choctaws played stickball, a witch could put a curse on the best players by making their legs sore. A witch might send a cat that would rub on the ballplayers' legs. The herb doctor could fix it though. When a game was played, the witch could get on one end of the field and the herb doctor on the other. They could send powers on the ball, and winds they sent would meet in the middle and cause a whirlwind. They could make the ball fly right into the sticks."

Gus also knew the reason for the decline of the witch. This is what he said:

"My father, who was a herb doctor, used to say that there aren't any more witches because the woods are getting thinner, but the underbushes are thicker and there is no place for them to be anymore."

Things happened to Gus that he could not explain, and even now, he still does not know what they were.

"A lot of things happened to me when I was younger that I can't explain, and I don't know what they were. I know the difference between those things and my imagination. When it is my imagination, I don't believe it. These things were not my imagination.

"There was an old, old church at Red Water where they used to have singing on Sunday nights. An old Choctaw died and we went to see him. On the way home, while walking past this church we heard the singing and saw the lights. We went over to the church and there was not a person there. The lights went out. We went in and touched a light

globe and it was cold."

Gus believes that what he saw on another occasion was the Bohpoli, not like he is known to look, but in a different form.

"Out by the Neshoba County Fairgrounds, there was a house that had been empty for years. We lived near it. One night I could not sleep and my wife said, 'Gus, if you can't sleep, why don't you go get us a possum?' So I got dressed and went out into the woods. I was near that old house where no one had lived for years. A long green light showed, then a maroon light, and then an orange light. It was floating along and it had been in that old house."[10]

Another elder interviewed was Charlie Denson from Standing Pine. During this interview, Charlie related some examples of Choctaw beliefs about owls:

"If someone wanted another person watched, and he held power over owls, he could send one of them to the person's house. Some witches could also turn themselves into owls, and some could make owls themselves. Cockleburs were covered with shredded cotton, and feathers were placed on it to be used as a tail. The 'owl' would be sent to someone's house. Both the real owl and the 'owl' made by the witch would have the same effect on the people at the house that was being watched. The owl was supposed to be a bad omen to the Choctaws."

Concerning Bohpoli, Charlie said that they would sometimes carry off small children, but would return them with news of whether the year would be good or bad. Also, he declared that the favorite foods of the Bohpoli were quail, fish, and turkey.[11]

The final person interviewed was not an elder, but a young man. During this interview, Chris Ben told of his experiences with owls:

"Dessie Willis, a Choctaw woman, was in the hospital at the Choctaw Health Center. I was behind Cecil Farmer's house, and an owl flew overhead and lit on the water tower. A passing car backfired and scared the owl away. About an hour later, the owl came back and hooted twice. I knew it was there to see that a certain person did not leave the hospital. Dessie died.

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[10]Interview with Gus Comby, Choctaw Elder, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 26 November 1984.

[11]Interview with Charlie Denson, Choctaw Elder, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Standing Pine, Mississippi, 20 December 1984.

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"In 1983, when my grandmother was in the same hospital, an owl came to that same water tower. I tried scaring it away by yelling and shooting at it with a slingshot, but it would not leave. The next morning, I woke up about 4:00 A.M. and with no thought of where I was going, I put on my clothes and started walking. Something led me to the hospital and I saw my relatives' cars, and I started to think that something bad had happened. I went in and found out that my grandmother had died. I went back to the water tower and saw the owl. Seeing the owl made me want to shoot it, but I knew that it would be no use, so I went home and told my folks."

The next event is the one that scared Chris the most.

"A short while ago, after it had rained all day, while on my way to visit my aunt, I stopped at my cousin Jimmy Ben's house. He was outside trying to clean a water drain to keep his little pond from flooding over, so I helped him. While working, we noticed an owl sitting on a tree about ten feet away, and it was sitting on a branch about nine feet from the ground. The owl was looking at Jimmy and me. Jimmy threw his rake at the owl, and it just 'kinda' flew up a little; and when the rake passed over, it settled back down on the tree. I threw a stick at it and it flew to another tree about thirty yards away.

"My cousin went in and came back with his high-powered rifle with a scope. I had the bullets, so I loaded the weapon. Jimmy had the owl right in his sights, but the rifle misfired. I loaded it again and aimed, but it misfired again. When I pointed in another direction, the rifle fired. The owl just looked at us and flew away into the woods.

"I was scared so badly--I wondered if the owl was for me, but Jimmy said that it was in his front yard and it was for him. He said that a week before, he saw an owl in his front yard. He went up to his neighbor's, Carlston Isaac, Sr., and the owl came up there. He left and went home, and when he arrived, the owl was already there. He went in the house to get the rifle and when he came out, the owl was gone."[12]

This is not a complete collection of Choctaw legends and superstitions, and although there probably will never be one, as long as these stories are told and written, they will never be forgotten.

To gain an understanding of high school students' perceptions of legends and superstitions, a survey was conducted at Choctaw Central High School during the fall semester, 1984. A copy of the survey and survey results follow:

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[12]Interview with Chris Ben, Choctaw Tribal Member, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 31 January 1985.

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SURVEY

1. Will you speak the name of someone who has died?
   Yes No Why or why not?
2. Do you believe in Bohpoli?
   Yes No
3. Do you believe in Na Losa Chitto?
   Yes No
4. Do you believe in herb doctors?
   Yes No
5. Do you believe in witchcraft?
   Yes No
6. Have you seen something that is supernatural in the Choctaw way?
   Yes No If yes, what?
7. Do you know anyone who has seen something that is supernatural in the Choctaw way?
   Yes No If yes, what?

SURVEY RESULTS

1. Will you speak the name of someone who has died? Why or why not?

9	Yes
22	No

Why or why not?

6	Was told not to.
5	His ghost will haunt you.
3	To remember the person.
2	I have never tried talking about people who have died.
1	My grandmother mentions the person's name.
1	It doesn't bother me.
1	Only one or two months after his death.
1	It might upset members of his family.
1	The person is no longer alive.
1	Reminder of the day of his death.
1	It scares me.
1	Sometimes it is better to think of people who are still alive.
1	A dead person should only be in the memory of people--not in their words.
1	I just don't believe in speaking a dead person's name.
1	No response

2. Do you believe in Bohpoli?

9	Yes
7	No
15	Don't know

3. Do you believe in Na Losa Chitto?

8	Yes
9	No
14	Don't know

4. Do you believe in herb doctors?

24	Yes
7	No

5. Do you believe in witchcraft?

16	Yes
15	No

6. Have you seen something that is supernatural in the Choctaw

way? If yes, what?

4 Yes

27 No

- Had a dream about a man dying. Ever since, I have felt his spirit around me when I am alone.
- Saw shadows at night.
- Doors opened by themselves.
- Felt a cold chill where a dead person had lived.

7. Do you know anyone that has seen something supernatural in the Choctaw way? If so, what?

10 Yes

21 No

- A huge smoke in the woods.
- A shape of the human form.
- Stories.
- A small man from the woods.
- A white figure.
- Crying.
- A horselike animal with red eyes.
- Something real big while opening a curtain.
- The cousin of a woman had died. She was playing cards with her brother and did not know of her cousin's death, until her mother called and told her. After she hung up a wind started and the door opened. Someone touched her shoulder, the wind stopped and the door closed. Then she had a strong urge to see her dead cousin but couldn't find the car keys.
- There was this guy who had a best friend who died in a car accident. The car went over a bridge and he drowned. The following weekend, a man was walking to his girlfriend's house. He heard footsteps behind him but no one was there. The footsteps started to get louder. The man ran and the man who had drowned chased him to a nearby house. The man knocked on the door until a woman opened it. She asked what was wrong and she found out that he was chased by his dead friend.

The survey results indicate that these high school students are fairly knowledgeable about many of the old Choctaw legends and superstitions. Though not many personal supernatural incidents were

reported, the majority believed they existed. More of these students believed in the herb doctors than in witchcraft.

Legends and superstitions, appearing in all cultures, add dimensions of mystery, of excitement, and of interest. Usually handed down through oral tradition, these stories, though embellished and altered, are meant to be shared and enjoyed just as they are. In our ever-advancing, technical world, they will continue to fulfill that human portion that longs to wonder and thus, never be certain.

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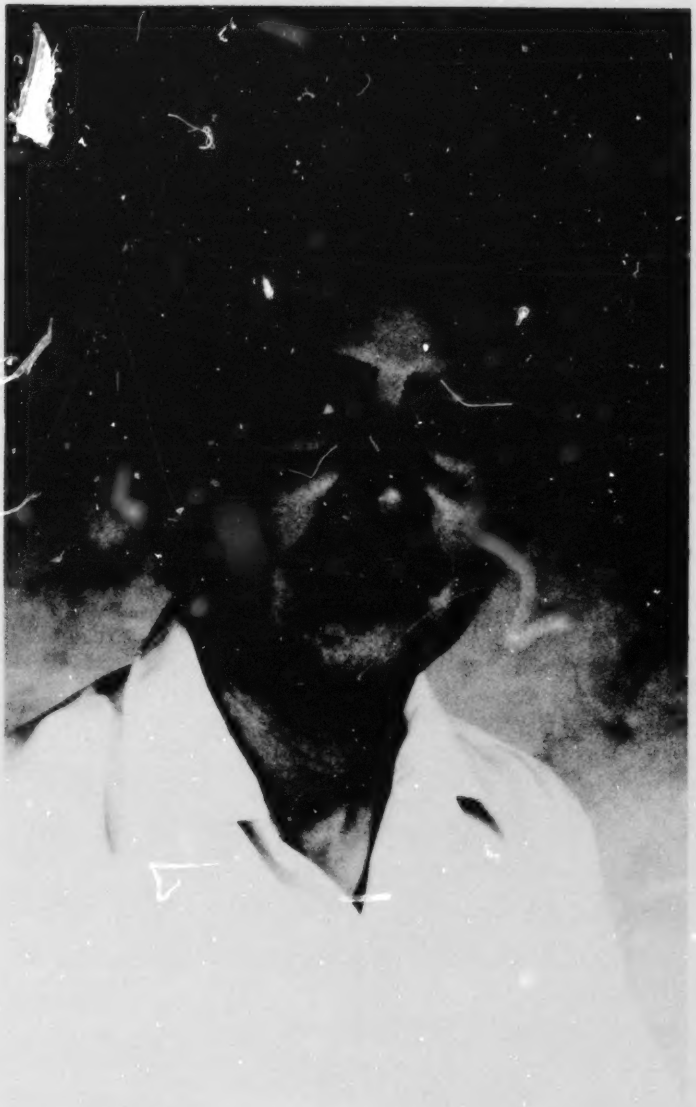

Terry Ben, Choctaw Tribal Member, History Teacher, Choctaw Central High School / Photo, courtesy of Terry Ben

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Gus Comby, Choctaw Tribal Member, Pearl River Community / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Charlie Denson, Choctaw Tribal Member, Standing Pine Community. Photo by Bill Brescia

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Chris Ben, Choctaw Tribal Member, Pearl River Community / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Blended cultures seek
A balance between two worlds
Finding truth in both

CHAPTER 8

GREENWOOD LEFLORE: A CHIEF OF CONTROVERSY

Mark John

Greenwood LeFlore[1] was the son of Major Louis LeFlore, a Canadian Frenchman, who settled in Mobile, Alabama, after being expelled by the English from Mississippi territory. After a few years, Louis moved to the "state of Mississippi and settled on Pearl River, in the county of Nashoba [sic] (wolf)." He later moved to the Yazoo Valley and settled there. Louis married Nancy Cravat, daughter of Frenchman John Cravat and his Choctaw wife. After Nancy's death, he married Rebecca Cravat, Nancy's sister. LeFlore had four sons and five daughters with his first wife and two sons with his second wife, Rebecca. Greenwood was the first-born son of Nancy and LeFlore.[2] He was born June 3, 1800, and "was named Greenwood for an English sea-captain, a friend and one-time partner of Louis LeFleur."[3]

When Greenwood was twelve, his father moved to "Choctaw county and settled near the old 'Natchez Trace,' a stage line from Nashville, Tennessee to Natchez, Mississippi." Louis LeFlore ran a tavern, "a house of entertainment for stage passengers." Major John Donly, of Nashville, always stopped at the "LeFleur tavern," called French Camp by the travelers--LeFlore being a Frenchman. Major Donly carried "United States mail from Nashville to Natchez," and

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[1]Variant spelling of Le Fleur. "Louis Le Fleur" had been a "great dancer" in Canada and was called "the flower of the fete. Hence the name Le Fleur, . . . [the] sobriquet [that] superseded his original name."

J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), p. 116n.

[2]H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez Indians*, ed. Angie Debo (New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), pp. 342-343.

[3]N.D. Deupree, "Greenwood Le Flore," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* 7 (1903): 142.

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during his stops at French Camp, he "became much interested in the bright and intelligent Indian boy," Greenwood, and persuaded Major LeFlore to "allow him to take the boy to Nashville and educate him." Greenwood stayed with Major Donly for six years, and while there, fell in love with Major Donly's daughter, Rosa. Her parents objected to his wish to marry her, on "account of the youthfulness of both parties." After some time had passed and the "love story" had apparently been forgotten, Greenwood asked Major Donly "what he would do if he were in love with a lady and her parents objected." Donly replied that he would "steal her and run away with her." Greenwood took his "advice" and ran away with Rosa and married her. They returned to Donly's home, but soon after moved to Mississippi, where LeFlore "rapidly gained prominence."[4]

Greenwood, of Choctaw and Caucasian blood, had the noblest traits of both races. He was able to cope with the natures of both the red and white man. "He was shrewd and far-seeing; social, yet reserved; ambitious as Lucifer, yet guarded in expression." He supported missionaries, and advocated and promoted reform and education. "His creed was that self-preservation is the first law, not only of nature, but of governments and peoples, and that there was no other danger so great to a people as ignorance."[5]

In 1822, Greenwood, at the age of twenty-two, was elected a chief by the Choctaws. At this time he was conferred the title of colonel and "honored with the sword and medal which Thomas Jefferson had bestowed upon a former chief." The sword is described as

> a magnificent blue steel blade, with a gold mounted handle; the medal is of silver, about four inches in diameter, symbolic of the peace and good will existing between the Choctaws and the United States, conveying the assurance of friendliness to the Indians so long as they remained true in their allegiance to the federal government. Upon one side of the medal is the pipe of peace laid across the tomahawk, beneath are two hands clasped in brotherly affection. The other side bears the words, "Peace and Prosperity," the name of the President and the date 1802.[6]

Claiborne records 1824 as the year Greenwood was chosen chief of his district:

> In 1824, under the democratic influences outside and around them, the warriors of . . . [LeFlore's] district, for the first time, chose a chief by

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[4] Ibid., p. 142.

[5] Ibid., pp. 142-143.

[6] Ibid., p. 143.

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popular election, and he was elected. Four years thereafter, he was re-elected, and his influence was greater than any other of the chiefs, and was felt throughout the nation. He accomplished many reforms. He induced many to send their children to school. He established regular meetings of the council for the adoption of laws to support teachers--to put down witchcraft and sorcery--to secure to every homicide a fair trial, the Indian custom being life for life, whether the homicide was accidental or malicious; to prevent infanticide, this sometimes being done in the case of illegitimate births; to encourage marriage, permanent residence, and cultivation of the soil; and religious instruction; to abolish the raising of poles over the dead, and adopt the usual style of christian [sic] sepulture. And to prevent the introduction and sale of liquor, under the penalty of a severe whipping.[7]

The Choctaws adopted Western ways "particularly in the prairie districts under the jurisdiction of David Folsom, and the Yazoo district under Greenwood LeFleur." Little progress was made by the Choctaws in the districts under Mushulatubbee and Nitakechi--"these two chieftains being pure Choctaws, uninstructed, and opposed to any innovation. . . ."[8]

A mounted patrol, called "light horsemen," was organized by LeFlore and Folsom, and the duty of this patrol was the punishment of all "criminals and desperadoes." They served as "sort of ambulatory jury, and first tried and then punished offenders." If a homicide was committed, evidence was collected, and if the party was guilty of "wilful and malicious murder," the verdict was announced and the time and place of execution was set. The guilty party was never arrested and never failed to appear. He positioned himself, kneeling, by the side of a grave that had already been dug; he "made a target on his naked breast," was shot, buried, and never mentioned again. If the condemned requested a "respite" for a few days or weeks, it was granted and he never failed to appear on the "designated" day of execution. The lash was used for minor offenses, a means of punishment not known until the "white influence."[9]

By 1828, the time Andrew Jackson became a candidate for president, Indian removal had become a "national issue." Jackson was a "strong partisan" of the states desiring removal of the Indians to the West. He impressed the Indians with his "dominating personality," and exercised a "tremendous influence" over them. "He became the

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[7] J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, p. 515.

[8] Ibid., p. 505.

[9] Ibid., pp. 505-506.

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outstanding exponent of the white man's relentless contest for the lands of the Indian."[10]

The Choctaw Nation, at this time, had made "some progress towards preparation" for the coming issues. LeFlore was intelligent and ambitious and realized the "import of events and their bearing on his personal fortunes." He called a meeting and told the head men that because of the crises facing the Choctaw Nation, the government must be changed from three chiefs to one.

> As part of this plan, on the second day of the council, David Folsom, the rival of Mushulatubbe for chieftainship in the northeastern district, and John Garland, claiming against Nitakechi the same office in the Southern district, resigned in the council such tenure as they held. They then voted to make Leflore chief of the whole nation.

That afternoon, LeFlore assumed the role of chief of the tribe and addressed the council in regard to difficulties and decisions confronting them. "After extended discussion the council voted in favor of emigration." A treaty was drawn up and signed by chiefs and warriors present. However, the treaty was followed by a protest from "chiefs and leading men who were not in sympathy with the ambitious LeFlore." The Senate rejected the treaty until commissioners could be appointed to meet with representatives of the "whole" tribe.[11]

LeFlore was not popular outside his own district, "particularly with the full-bloods, and the tribe as a whole was opposed to him as chief." LeFlore's concept of one chief "probably had the sanction of the administration at Washington," but jealousy and bitter feelings increased between "the chiefs and factions of the tribe and did more harm than good." In April, 1830, LeFlore wrote Mushulatubbee an arrogant letter warning him that he must "abdicate as district chief and conform to the views of the writer or take the consequences." Mushulatubbee replied in writing that he would never acknowledge LeFlore and Folsom as chiefs and that the consequences could fall where they might. The plans of LeFlore were "thwarted" when Mushulatubbee challenged LeFlore and his party to name a day and place for the fight, since Mushulatubbee and his followers were unarmed at that time. LeFlore replied that he only wanted to restore peace; that he did not want to fight.[12]

Discussion regarding removal began at Dancing Rabbit Creek,

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[10]Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 21.

[11]Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[12]Ibid., pp. 23-26.

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September 15, 1830, when Commissioners Eaton and Coffee warned the Choctaws that their "best interests required their removal to the West." The means that resulted in "securing execution of the treaty," September 27, were many. George S. Gaines, a merchant who dealt honestly with the Indians and was respected for his "character and ability," agreed to conduct a party to examine the western country to see if it was satisfactory; and if so, to manage the removal.

> The other means employed are obvious; the three chiefs of the three districts, who signed the treaty, Greenwood Leflore, Nitakechi, and Mushulatubbe were each given four sections of land by the treaty. More than fifty other favored members of the tribe put forward by the chiefs, were given from one to two sections each for no apparent reason other than to win their approval and influence and remove their opposition. Medals and gratuities were passed about. David Folsom, besides receiving four sections of land, was later allowed one hundred dollars for the expense of each of his two sons at La Grange Academy, in Georgia, and Greenwood Leflore was given one hundred dollars to send his daughter to the Female Academy at the same place.[13]

This treaty, known as the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, was ratified February 24, 1831. The Choctaws ceded "to the United States the entire country owned by them east of the Mississippi river and agreed to remove on the domain within Indian Territory which the government promised to convey to them in fee simple; the Indians were given three years to emigrate." The lands conveyed to the Choctaws were described in the treaty, with boundaries

> "beginning near Fort Smith where the Arkansas boundary crosses the Arkansas river, running thence to the source of the Canadian fork, if in the limits of the United States, or to those limits; thence due south to Red river, and down Red river to the west boundary of the Territory of Arkansas, thence, north along that line, to the beginning."[14]

Many of the Indians prepared immediately for their "long trek" to Oklahoma. The "stream of emigration," put in motion in 1831, "continued through 1832 and 1833, leaving only about seven thousand Choctaws in Mississippi."[15] Greenwood LeFlore remained in Mississippi, but Nitakechi and Mushulatubbee "elected to share the fate of their people in the West."[16]

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[13]Ibid., pp. 26-28.

[14]*U.S. Senate Document No. 512*, Twenty-third Congress, First Session, "Indian Removal," vol. 2, p. 304, quoted by Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), pp. 28-29.

[15]Grant Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), p. 16, cited by Charlie Mitchell Beckett, "Choctaw Indians in Mississippi Since 1830," M.A. thesis, 1949, p. 7.

[16]Charlie Mitchell Beckett, "Choctaw Indians in Mississippi Since 1830" (M.A. Thesis, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1949), p. 7.

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Some of the Indians believed that LeFlore had acted in their welfare; others believed that he "advocated" the treaty for his own interests. LeFlore remained on the reservation that was "secured to him by the treaty." When accused of being bribed by the United States Government to sign the treaty, his reply was: "Which is worse, for a great government to offer a bribe or a poor Indian to take one? Nothing more was said about bribery."[17]

> Colonel LeFlore was an extensive and successful planter, having 15,000 acres of land, much of it the finest in the State. He owned 400 slaves, who were well fed, well clad, humanely treated, and cared for like children, being provided with warm houses and an abundance of fuel. A physician was kept on the plantation to look after the sick, and none were ever sold save an occasional vicious character that could not be controlled by humane measures. The principal crop was cotton.[18]

LeFlore built a town of his own, called "Point LeFlore" when he became displeased with management at a landing where cotton was stored. Point LeFlore, located at the junction of the Tallahatchie and Yalobusha rivers, contained "a church, hotel, schoolhouse, post office, stores and residences"; but the Civil War and failing health caused LeFlore to lose "interest in the town, and those to whom he willed the property . . . allowed Point LeFlore to become extinct."[19]

Malmaison, LeFlore's "beautiful and palatial residence," was built of cypress cut from his own lands. It was built by J.C. Harris, who later married LeFlore's youngest daughter. LeFlore was described as "honest, brave and loyal, not only to the United States, but to personal friends as well. He was also very charitable." He was sent twice to the "lower House of the Legislature and once to the Senate." He married three times. His first wife was Rosa Donly, with whom he had two children, Elizabeth and John. His second wife was Elizabeth Coody, a Cherokee and niece of Chief Ross. "She lived but a short time and left no children." His third wife was "Priscilla Donly, of Nashville, who was a sister of his first wife." They had one daughter, who married J.C. Harris, the builder of Malmaison.[20]

> Colonel LeFlore's love for the old flag was so great that, as he lay dying, he asked to see the flag. It was brought and he gazed fondly upon it till sight grew dim, when he requested his little granddaughters, Louie and Rosa LeFlore and Florence Harris, to hold it over him that he might die

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[17] N.D. Deupree, "Greenwood Le Flore," p. 146.

[18] Ibid., pp. 146-147.

[19] Ibid., p. 147.

[20] Ibid., pp. 147-150.

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under the Stars and Stripes. When he passed from earthly scenes, according to his dying request, the flag he loved so well was wrapped about him and he was buried in its folds. His remains now repose in the family burying ground. . . . A beautiful monument of white marble marks his last resting place, bearing the inscription:[21]

GREENWOOD LEFLORE
Last Great Chief of the Choctaw
Indians East of the Miss. River
Died Aug. 31, 1865,
Aged 65 Years,
The gift of God is eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord
LEFLORE

[21]Ibid., p. 150

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The old Natchez Trace / Photo reprinted by permission of Mississippi State Department of Archives

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Green[illegible]od LeFlore, photo copied from the original / Reprinted by permission of Mississippi State Department of Archives

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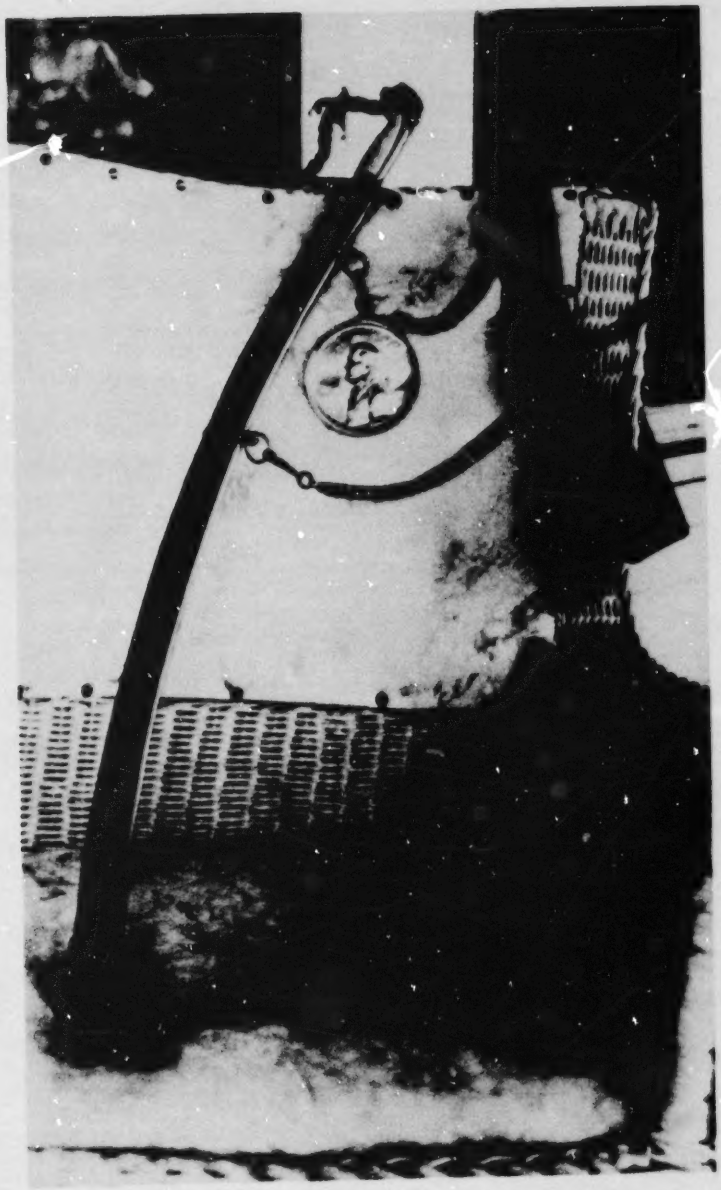

Sword and medal presented to Greenwood LeFlore / Photo by Mary Ethel Dismukes / Reprinted by permission of Mississippi State Department of Archives

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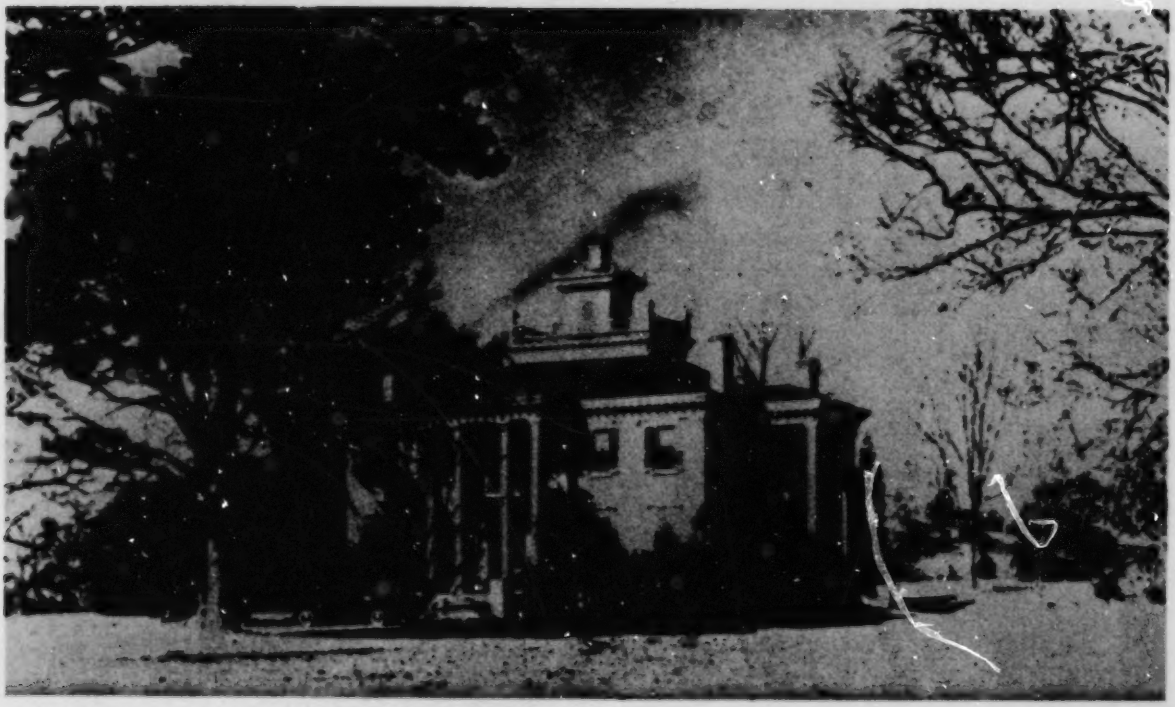

Malmaison, Greenwood LeFlore's palatial home, before its destruction by fire, March 31, 1942 / Photo provided by Professor R. Halliburton

Marker at Greenwood LeFlore's grave, located in the family cemetery, Carroll County, Mississippi / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Old ways of life through
Extended families are
Cherished by Choctaws

CHAPTER 9

A LOOK INTO CHOCTAW HOUSING

Dora Mingo

The Choctaw Reservation, located in east-central Mississippi, is the home of nearly five thousand Choctaws. The tribe is known as the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and has gained national recognition as one of the most progressive tribes in North America. This is evidenced in their growing economic development.

The Choctaw Reservation is managed by the Choctaw government, designed and established by the Choctaws. The governmental body consists of: the Tribal Chief, elected every four years; the Tribal Council, consisting of sixteen members elected from the seven communities that form the reservation (three each from Pearl River, Bogue Chitto, and Conehatta; two each from Tucker, Standing Pine, and Red Water; one from Bogue Homa);[1] and seven committees formed to provide "greater expertise in legislative decision making. . . ."[2]

From 1953 until 1968, the policy of the Federal Government toward many North American Indian tribes was to end federal services and benefits, and to dissolve their reservations. Then in 1968, a new era began, Self-Determination.

The Federal Government prohibited states from having jurisdiction over Indian reservations without tribal consent. Acts were passed "to stimulate Indian entrepreneurship and employment;" to develop natural resources; to administer Federal Indian programs on the reservations; and to stimulate the purchase of Indian products and Indian labor "by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in negotiating and fulfilling its contracts."[3]

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[1]Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, *Revised Constitution and Bylaws of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians* (1974), approved by United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1975), p. 2.

[2]Benjamin Strout, "A New Era," in *Choctaw Tribal Government, A New Era*, ed. William Bressie (Philadelphia, Mississippi: Choctaw Heritage Press, 1982), p. 41.

[3]Steven L. Pevar, *The Rights of Indians and Tribes* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1983), pp. 6-7.

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With this new federal attitude toward Indian tribes, the Choctaws took advantage of this opportunity to chart their own future. "Tribal government leaders realized that with unemployment on the reservation approaching 80% in the 1960's, the goal of self-determination would not be accomplished without the economic self-sufficiency of the tribe."[4] During the late 1970's, the Choctaws began plans for an industrial and business park development. "In 1978, the industrial park was expanded to 80 acres; and with seed money from Chata Development, the tribally-owned construction company, an industrial building was contructed. [Variant spellings of Chahta/Chata (Choctaw) are used.] Negotiations by tribal leaders to locate business and industry in the Park had succeeded."[5]

In 1979, a charter for Chahta Enterprise was approved by the Tribal Council, to be a tribally-owned enterprise. Chahta Enterprise is a supplier to the Packard Electric Division of General Motors, and produces wire harness assemblies for Chevrolet pick-up trucks and Buick LaSabres. The work force at the Enterprise has two hundred employees (seventy-five percent Choctaw), and it has gained a reputation for quality, with the lowest rejection rate of any of Packard's suppliers in Mississippi.[6] "In 1981, after nearly ten years of negotiations, a contract between the American Greetings Corporation and another tribally owned business, Choctaw Greetings Enterprise, was signed to hand finish quality greeting cards."[7]

Also a part of the Choctaw Industrial Park is Chata Development. One of their major accomplishments is the building of houses for tribal members on the Reservation. Until recently, most of the dwellings were old Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) houses, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) houses, or mobile homes. Due to the deterioration of some of these houses; plus the return of many Choctaws to the Reservation, and the increased number of tribal members, it became apparent that more houses were needed. Therefore, plans to build new houses were initiated.

Following are a series of interviews, conducted by the author, to learn more about Choctaw Reservation housing:

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[4]Benjamin Strout, "A New Era," in *Choctaw Tribal Government, A New Era*, p. 41.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

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Morris Carpenter, Executive Director of Choctaw Housing Authority, responded to the following questions:

1. What is your job title?

   "Executive Director, Choctaw Housing Authority (CHA)."

2. What are your job responsibilities?

   "My job responsibilities cover three operations: management of existing houses, which includes home-buyer contracts, lease agreements, and maintenance; financial operations; and development of new houses. We take care of maintenance of all houses, with a crew of approximately twenty-five, full-time employees. I am responsible for the development of new houses, and for making applications to the government to get new houses.

   "CHA's role in the development of the new houses includes: set up finances, hire the architect, locate the lots, determine what materials are needed, survey the lots, prepare the roads, put in water and sewer lines, oversee the building and inspection of the houses. CHA sees that the houses are built to specification and then sees that upon inspection they are acceptable--then the people can move in."

3. What are the job qualifications?

   "I have a BA (Bachelor of Arts) in American History and a Masters in Political Science. I began overseas in economic and community development in Southeast Asia and West Africa in similar developments as here. In this country, I worked in the California Governor's Office in economic development. I started a Housing Authority for the Penobscot Nation in Maine and was there four years. We built houses, facilities, roads, bridges, water lines, and sewer lines. In Indian housing, I'm one of the 'old ones'--I know everyone in American Indian Housing and I am on the Board of Directors of the National American Indian Housing Council. I've known Phillip [Chief Phillip Martin] for fifteen to twenty years."

4. What is the main function of Choctaw Housing Authority?

   "To develop and manage houses."

5. What is a HUD (Housing and Urban Development) house?

"On the Choctaw Reservation, it is the one developed and managed by CHA. It is financed by HUD. HUD builds houses in a group which is referred to as a project. By 1980, six projects were completed (about 300 houses). Since 1980, 330 houses have been completed (involving four additional projects) for a total of 630 houses."

6. What is a BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) house?

"The houses built by CHA have nothing to do with houses associated with the BIA or rather CHA has nothing to do with BIA houses which are also know as HIP (Home Improvement Program) houses. Here, the BIA housing program is small. Occasionally they build new houses, but mainly they repair old ones. We hope to replace the old BIA houses with HUD houses. The old tribal houses were built under the New Deal."

7. Please tell me about the houses being built today?

a. What is the name of the project?

"This project, sometimes referred to as the Two Hundred House Project, is Project number 92-8 (78 houses) and Project 92-9 (122 houses) for a total of two hundred houses. CHA was fortunate enough to be awarded both projects at the same time."

b. How is the project funded?

"By a Department of Housing and Urban Development loan. CHA gets underwriting financing--the Government guarantees the banks that the loan money to CHA to build the houses will be paid. About nine million dollars was awarded for the two hundred houses. We applied for note sale--project bonds--and banks from all around the United States bid on the notes.

"Upon completion of the construction phase, permanent financing is arranged with a twenty-five-year mortgage. The banks are paid once a year by the Government. The homebuyers' payments to CHA are based on their incomes, and CHA keeps a small amount for managing costs. The rest goes to the Government; therefore, the Government gets some of its money back. In that way, this is not a grant."

c. How long did it take for the planning, appropriation of funds, and contracting decisions?

"In April 1980, I first began working on the plans. On September 30, 1982, the Government awarded CHA the two hundred units. We then found the sites. I personally selected each site. The sites were then surveyed and leased from the Tribal Council. Next, the architect was selected and five designs were developed. The object was to build a project that didn't look like a 'Government Project,' to give the houses individual character, and the people a choice. The people getting the houses select the colors, design, brick, etc. from samples. Then a chart is made for each lot.

"In addition to the nine million dollars, there is one and one-half million dollars for sewer and water lines from the Indian Health Service (IHS). All of these plans took until July 1983."

d. When did construction begin?

"Construction began in October 1983."

e. When will they be finished?

"The contract calls for April 1985."

f. What determines who gets to have a house?

"Anyone who wants a house fills out an application. The applications are ranked according to income, family size, and present housing conditions. The applications go to the CHA Board of Commissioners and they select the families who get the houses.

"The rate for rental houses is based on need and income. If the renter's income is low, the rent could be zero and the renter does not have to maintain the house.

"An owner needs to have income enough to pay the minimum fee and needs to maintain the house. The owner can pay CHA for maintenance. The minimum payment is thirty dollars a month."

g. What is the price range of the houses?

"The range of payments can be $30 to $450 a month (the latter is the maximum). The amount paid is fifteen percent of their adjusted income. In addition, they are given a utility allowance."

h. Are there plans for any more houses?

"We have applied for 150 more houses and have gotten twenty. Construction will begin in the spring of 1985. We are going to

apply for 150 more in January 1985. The Eastern HUD Office is in Chicago and there are thirty-five Indian housing authorities in the eastern United States. The allocation of houses is based on past performance with previous houses. 'Choctaw' has been allocated over half of all available houses. (We have to worry about the political aspects)."

i. How many more houses are needed?

"There is always going to be a need for houses as the tribe is growing. For now, four hundred more houses would help."

j. How has the building of the houses helped the tribe economically?

"Two ways: jobs--more Choctaws are working, and profits of building go to the tribe because they own Chata Development. After the houses are occupied, this stabilizes the community. It puts the people closer to their jobs and allows them to stay on the Reservation."

8. Are there any plans to replace some of the old HUD and BIA houses?

   Answered in question six.

9. What does the future hold for the Choctaw Housing Authority?

   "At present, there is a thirty-year contract between the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Choctaw Housing Authority, and the United States Government, involving millions of dollars. Right now, the future looks good."

10. Is there anything more of interest that you could tell me?

    "No, I probably covered the subject."[1]

* * *

Herman Reid, Maintenance Superintendent, Choctaw Housing Authority answered the following questions:

1. What is your job title?

   "Maintenance Superintendent."

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[1]Interview with Morris Carpenter, Executive Director, Choctaw Housing Authority, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 5 December 1984.

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2. What is the name of the program under which you work?

   "Choctaw Housing Authority."

3. How long have you been there?

   "Five years."

4. How long have you done this kind of work?

   "Thirty years."

5. How many people do you supervise?

   "I supervise eight permanent employees and seven temporary employees. The temporary employees have been 'temporary' now for a year and a half."

6. Why have they been temporary for a year and a half?

   "The money to pay their positions only comes in on a yearly basis, and we can't guarantee them employment, so we keep them on a temporary status."

7. What do they do?

   "The permanent employees take care of all the houses and do any type of repair: electrical, plumbing, carpentry, etc. on anything that could go wrong in one of the Choctaw houses. The permanent employees are not journeymen; they are only trainees. The temporary employees need constant supervision, and they mainly do carpentry work."

8. Is it possible for the trainees to become journeymen?

   "Yes, it is possible, and I am working on it now. I am trying to get people qualified, and trying to work out the paper work with the State to get people certified by the State. I have one employee who is a Journeyman Carpenter. He supervises all of the temporary employees and is qualified in all areas. He reports directly to me. He has been on staff for two years."

9. How many homes does the crew work on?

   "All Choctaw Housing Authority homes number close to seven hundred units. The units are located in all the communities. The most difficult community in which to keep the homes maintained is Bogue Homa, because of the distance." [Bogue Homa is located approximately one hundred miles south of Pearl River, the community where Choctaw Housing Authority is located.]

10. How many of the employees are Choctaw?

"All but three; one is black and two are naholos [Whitemen]."

11. How are the employees trained?

"From time to time, when something comes up that they can't deal with, I go to the site and teach them how to fix whatever it is. From then on, I expect them to fix it whenever they come across that particular problem again."

12. Are there any "supporters" other than yourself?

"Yes, there is one Housing Inspector, in addition to the people we have already mentioned. I develop an inspection schedule for two to six months; then he goes around and checks all the homes. He also checks move-ins and move-outs. I will also respond directly to a call from a councilman who says that one of the houses in their community needs to be inspected."

13. Are there any problems that you are having right now?

"Well, the biggest problem is that no one other person is qualified to work on air conditioning units. Right now, we have two men, Gerald Sockey and Al Amos, who are attending MJC in their off-time to be certified to work on air conditioning units. Their tuition is being paid by the Vocational Education Program. Both have completed their first semester and both are doing real well."

14. If one of the trainees receives his journeyman card, would it be valid anywhere other than on the Choctaw Reservation?

"Yes, the journeyman card will have the same requirements as the State. Also, they will probably be certified by the State as well as by the Tribe."[9]

* * *

Claude Shook is the General Manager of Chata Development and granted the following interview:

1. What is the title of your job?

"My job title is General Manager of Chata Development Company. Presently, we are involved in building houses through the Two Hundred Mutual Help Program."

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[9]Interview with Herman Reid, Maintenance Superintendent, Choctaw Housing Authority, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 20 December 1984.

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2. What are the qualifications for your job?

   "For this position, a person needs a college degree in building or engineering sciences with experience in residential, road building, and utility and commercial construction. I feel that five years experience is crucial. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in building construction from Georgia Institution of Technology."

3. What are your job responsibilities?

   "My job is to generally manage the company."

4. How many people work for Chata Development?

   "Approximately two hundred, but the number fluctuates according to the amount of work available."

5. How many workers do you supervise and what are their duties?

   "Please refer to the Chata Development Company Organization Chart."

6. What percentage of employees are Choctaw? Women?

   "Approximately sixty percent of the employees are Choctaw. Most of the women are office employees. All employees are nonunion."

7. Is most of the work full-time?

   "Ninety-eight percent of the employees are considered full-time, and sixty-five to seventy percent of this percentage are working on the two-hundred-house project."

8. Why are the houses being built?

   "The Choctaw Housing Authority (CHA) ran a survey on housing needs in the reservation communities. There is a definite need for housing; in fact several hundred more are needed. When someone wants a house, they apply to CHA to see if they qualify. People will actually own their own houses. They can opt to help build their own house, and if they do, this cuts down on the payment; however, if they don't want to help, they don't have to. This project is administered by the Choctaw Housing Authority, and Chata Development has been contracted to build the houses. Chata is a membership corporation and has one hundred percent Choctaw membership."

9. How many houses are being built?

   "At present, two hundred."

10. What are the sizes of the houses?

    "The houses range in size from 1,100 square feet up to 1,500 square feet. There are three, four, and five bedroom houses available, with the three bedroom house having one bathroom and the four and five bedroom houses having two bathrooms. There are facilities for connecting washers and dryers."

11. Who will live in these new houses?

    "Mostly Choctaw families."

12. Where are they located?

    "All houses are on reservation land, and all seven communities, plus Crystal Ridge, have homes."[10]

    Following is a breakdown of the houses being built in each of the seven communities, plus Crystal Ridge:

Pearl River	73
Conehatta	35
Red Water	26
Tucker	21
Standing Pine	18
Bogue Chitto	12
Crystal Ridge	10
Bogue Homa	5

13. How does one qualify for a house?

    "Anyone wanting a house must apply to Choctaw Housing Authority."

14. Is there anything else you could tell us about the houses that would be of interest?

[10]Crystal Ridge is a settlement of Choctaws located north of Bogue Chitto reservation community. In 1983, the tribe purchased 113 acres of this land, and in 1984 an additional forty-four acres, totaling 157 acres. Before this land becomes reservation land, it must be proclaimed trust land by the Secretary of the Interior. At present, Crystal Ridge is not officially considered a reservation community, and has no direct representation on the Tribal Council. In order for this to occur, there would have to be an amendment to the tribal constitution approved by the Tribal Council. Upon council approval, the next step would be a BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) referendum that would go before tribal voters. If adopted by tribal voters, the final step would be to the Department of the Interior for approval.

Interview with Arthur Bridge, Planning Officer, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 4 March 1985.

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"The design is unique in that there is more architectural design than is found on most public housing. There is a choice of three fronts, each one based on a Southern tradition.* All have central heating, and a range and refrigerator. They have an access for hooking up a wood burning heater. The lots are prepared to make the houses blend in with the surrounding wooded areas. The houses are placed on lots of a minimum of one acre. The Choctaw families pick their own paneling, tile, paint, color, shingles, and siding. The walls and ceiling are painted sheet rock, except for the living room which is paneled.

*Editor's note: The square-shaped houses are representative of the old-style Choctaw houses, circa 1500.

"At present, there are ten houses completed and by Christmas, 1984, they expect to have fifty more completed, with the rest ready by spring.

"As for the labor force, there is a Choctaw preference for all positions; however, non-Indian people are at present filling the skilled positions. During this project, the Choctaws that are not skilled are being trained. The apprenticeship program is designed to prepare Choctaws without skills to become skilled and to take over the jobs that are now held by non-Indians. This program will be a three-to-four-year program. The first phase is in the classroom at Manpower Training Center. The second phase is on-the-job-training. An employee advances through three levels: At level one, the employee is considered an unskilled laborer. As one gains in job experience and knowledge, level two is attained--that of an apprentice. This level requires more skill and pays more money. When sufficient skill and knowledge are attained at this level, plus a high degree of performance, the final level is attained--journeyman.

"Chata Development is owned totally by the Choctaws and any Choctaw who wants to become a member can buy a membership for $1.00. The company is here for the benefit and use of the Choctaw people by providing jobs and constructing facilities for tribal use. This company is unique in that the Choctaws are really shown to be leaders in economic development and this is noted at national level. Many other tribes look to the Choctaws for ways to simulate their economic growth.

"Problems have arisen while building the houses. Many times, vandalism occurs, and I wonder if the Choctaw people really understand that the houses are theirs and they need to help take care and protect what is theirs. Chata is not a separate entity--it is here to help the Choctaw people."[11]

* * *

Boots Howell, Project Manager and Estimator for Chata Development Company, responded to the following questions:

1. What is the title of your job?

   "Project Manager and Estimator. I have worked here since May 1984."

2. What are your job responsibilities?

   "I estimate the jobs that we bid and I compile the bids--for building only. I do the purchasing and bulk buying of materials, and I assign the superintendents' work and try to encourage progress of the jobs."

3. What are the job qualifications?

   "I have a degree from Mississippi State University in Electrical Engineering. For thirty-five years, I was in a partnership with my brother. We were building contractors. I am a native Mississippian, so it is fortunate that I am able to work at 'home'."

4. How many workers do you supervise and what are their duties?

   "I supervise all eight superintendents. There is one superintendent for each project site. I assign them the work they are to perform, and I help them lay it out in the field. I schedule material to be delivered to the various sites. I also assist with the labor assignments. The superintendents and I meet here in this office prior to 7:00 A.M. on a daily basis. If they are in the field, we discuss assignments on the radio. It is a daily task, but a very smooth, continuous operation--not segmented."

5. Is your work full-time?

   "Yes."

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[11]Interview with Claude Shook, General Manager, Chata Development Company, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 29 November 1984.

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6. Do you supervise the workers in all eight building sites?

"I supervise the supervisors and they handle the crews. I visit the sites as often as possible."

7. What is your typical day like?

"I get here about 6:30 A.M. I discuss problems with the superintendents and they advise me of any materials needed by them or the sub-contractors. We sub-contract the heating, ventilation, air conditioning, plumbing, and electrical work. I take job assignments and make sure the material the supervisors need is here or on the way to the site. I do any estimating that needs to be done. I visit the job sites, and I do a lot of 'trouble-shooting'--there's always plenty of that."

8. What do you like best about your job?

"My Daddy was a contractor and I grew up with it a part of me. It's really in my blood. I love to see things being built and growing toward a completed project. I like the challenge of doing a job for a specific price quoted and making a profit."

9. What do you like least about your job?

"Being subjected to the whims of nature. Our progress is totally dependent on the weather."

10. Is there anything else of interest that you can tell me?

"Construction is a fascinating field. It involves so many facets, even including personalities of workers, inspectors*, and owners. There is never a dull day in this business, and I'm very grateful to be in it and a part of this organization.

*Usually, the architects have their own inspectors and those are the only ones, but here we have additional inspectors from the Choctaw Housing Authority. A good indication of work quality is the amount that has to be redone--corrective work."[12]

As one drives around the Choctaw Reservation, it is apparent that these new homes will make a fine addition for the tribe. At present, many families are moving into their new homes. Hopefully, this growing tribe, a proud and unique group of people, will be awarded more of these homes.

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[12]Interview with Boots Howell, Project Manager and Estimator, Chata Development Company, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River, Mississippi, 31 January 1985.

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Chata Development Company, located in the Choctaw Industrial Park, Pearl River, Mississippi / Photo by Bill Brescia

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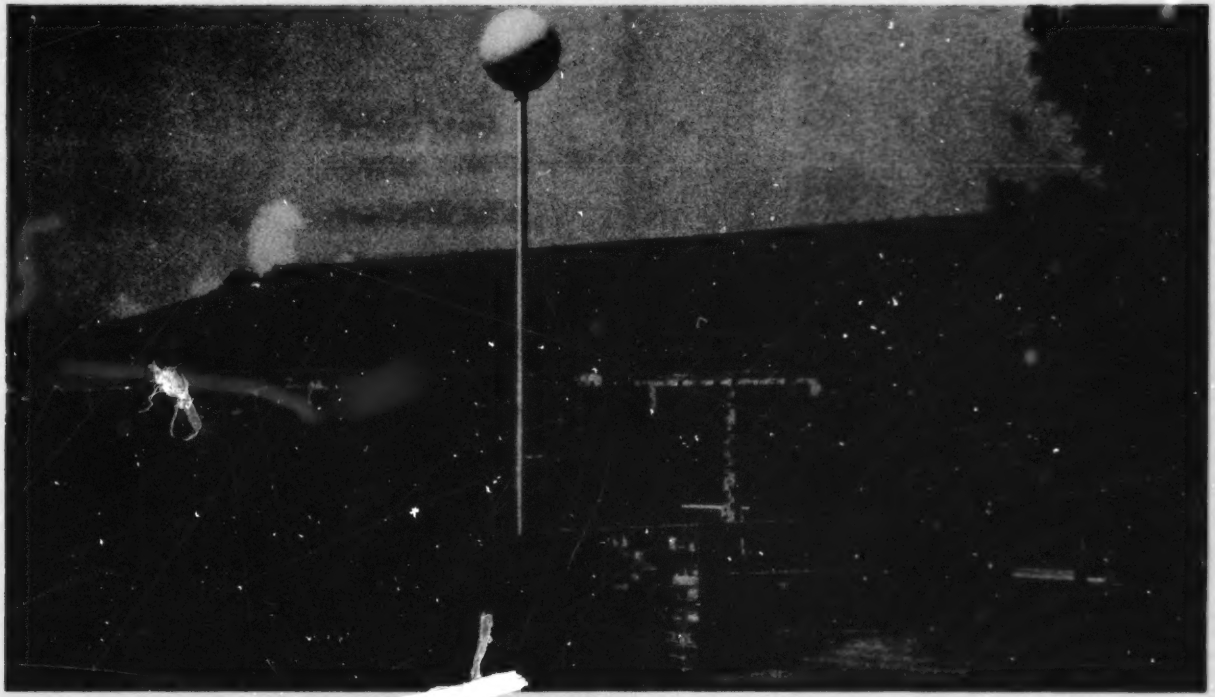
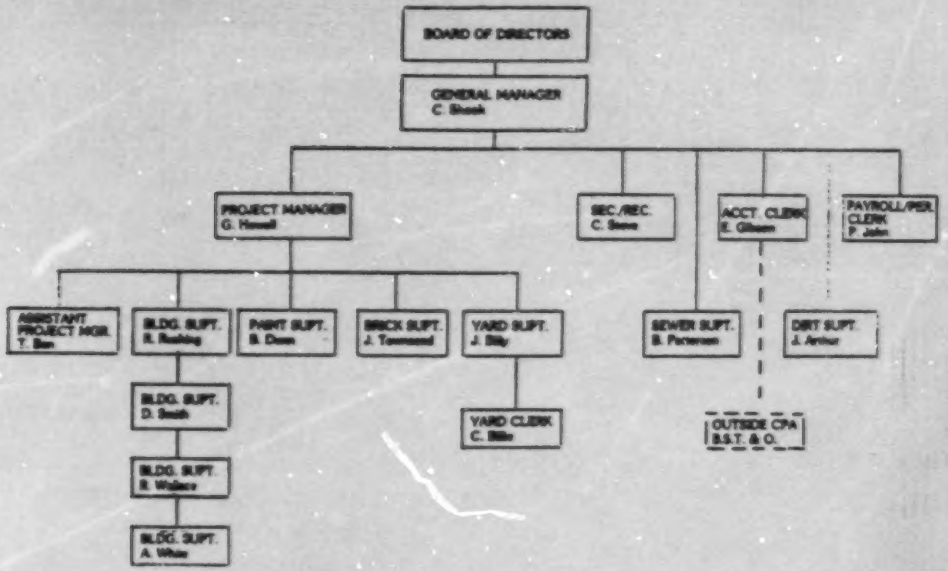


Choctaw Housing Authority, Pearl River, Mississ... noto by Bill Brescia

ORGANIZATION CHART
OF
CHATA DEVELOPMENT COMPANY
CHATA SEPTIC TANK COMPANY



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Chata
DEVELOPMENT
COMPANY

Classification	No. Employees	Non-Indians	Indians
Office Staff	8	50%	50%
Superintendents	12	83%	17%
Labors	68	3%	97%
Carpenters	41	98%	2%
Carpenters Apprentice	26	15%	85%
Painters	20	55%	45%
Masonry	9	100%	-0-
Masonry Apprentice	3	-0-	100%
Pipe Layers	4	50%	50%
Plumber	1	100%	-0-
Machine Operators	10	70%	30%
Yard/Shop Workers	8	25%	75%
Drivers	3	33%	67%
Sheet Metal Worker	1	100%	-0-
Security Guard	2	-0-	100%
Totals	**216**	**44%**	**56%**

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Morris Carpenter, Executive Director, Choctaw Housing Authority / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Herman Reid, Maintenance Superintendent, Choctaw Housing Authority / Photo by Bill Brescia

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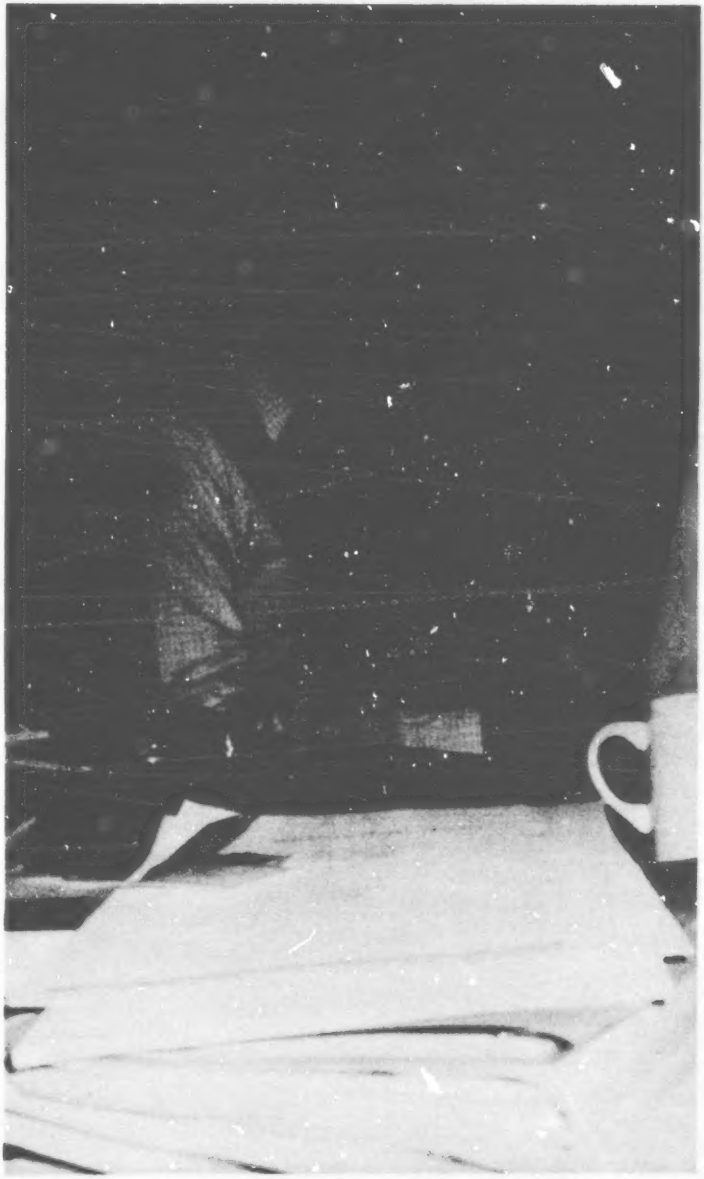

Arthur Bridge, Planning Officer, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians / Photo by Bill Brescia

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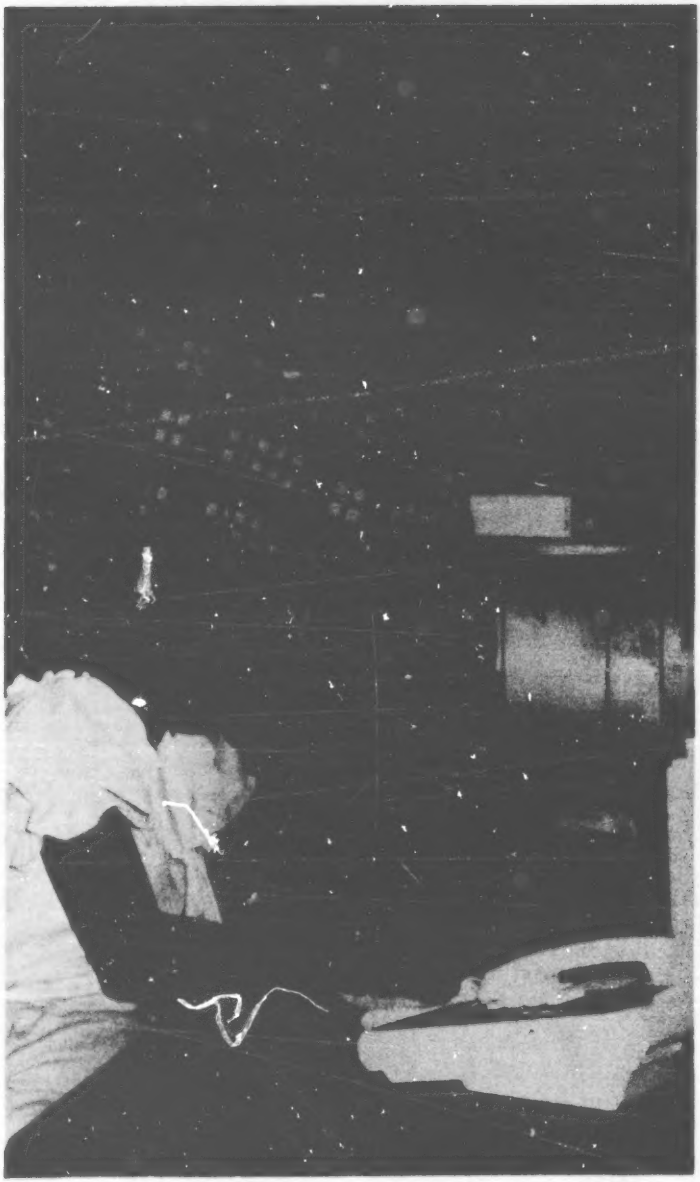

Claude Shook, General Manager, with secretary, Chata Development Company / Photo by Bill Brescia

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Boots Howell, standing, Project Manager-Estimator, Chata Development Company / Photo by Bill Brescia

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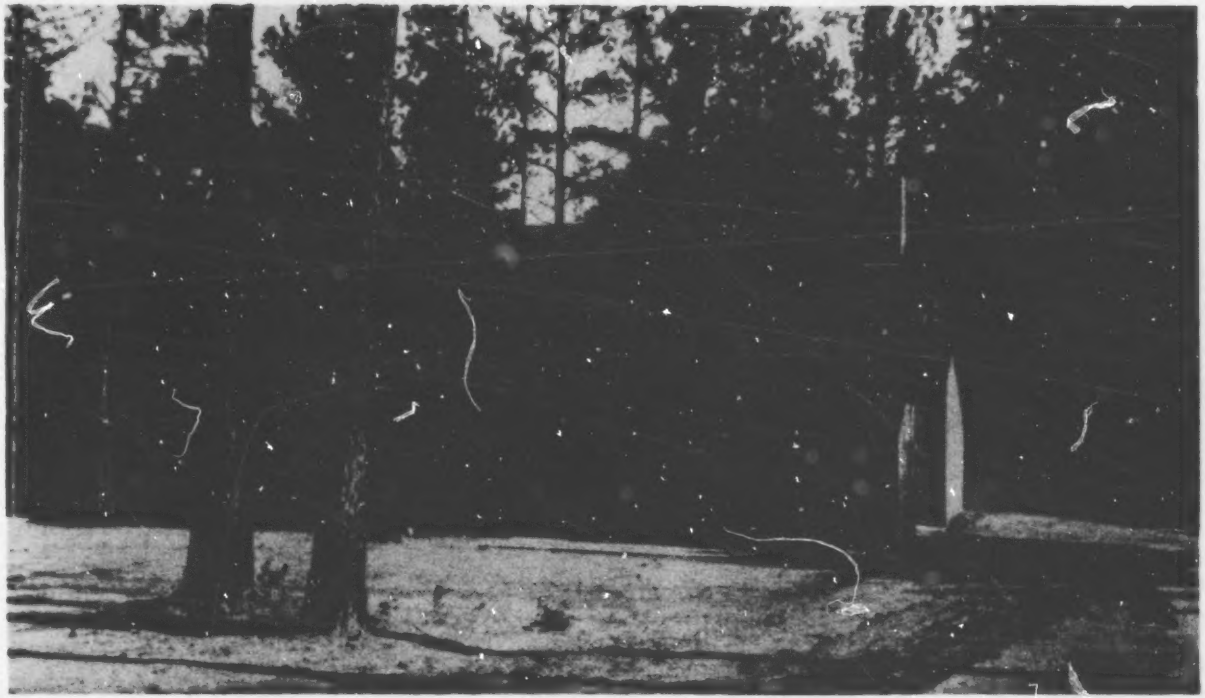
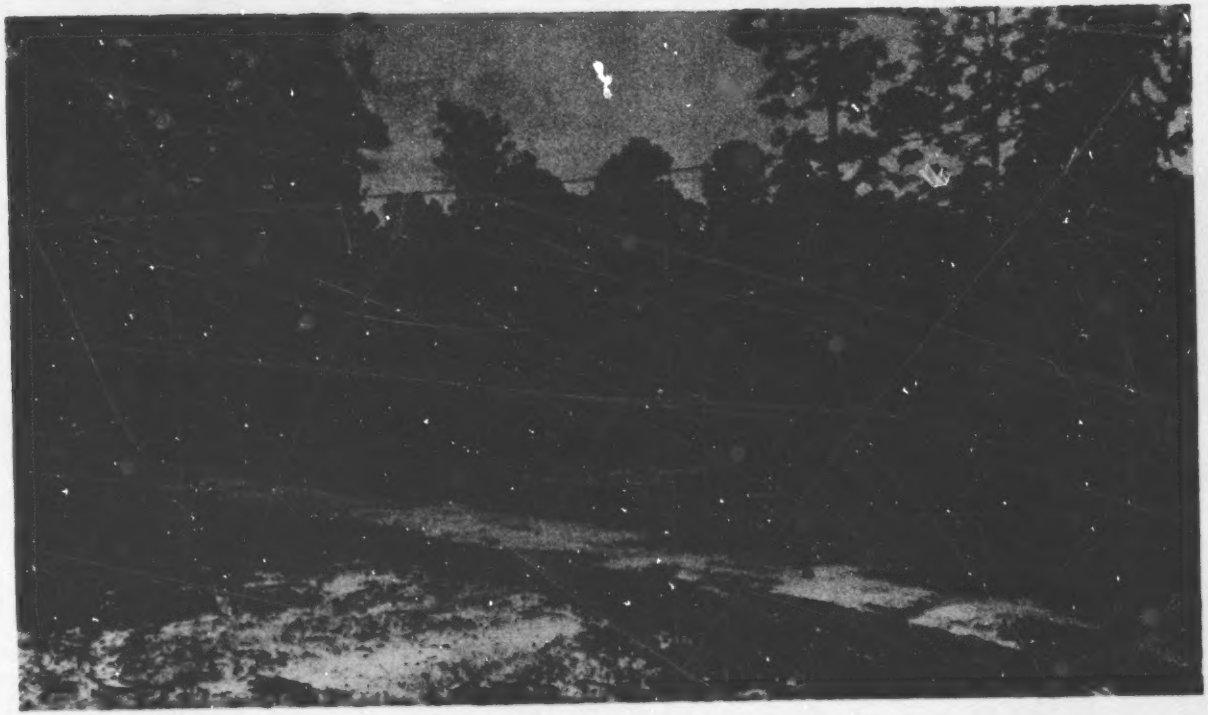


A new Housing and Urban Development (HUD) home built at Pearl River by Chata Development Company / Photo by Bill Brescia



An alternate-design HUD home, recently built by Chata Development / Photo by Bill Brescia

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A third design used in a HUD home built by Chata Development Company / Photo by Bill Brescia

A Reflection

Lift yourself above the spinning world,

For like the eagle, you must fly.

—From the Sioux